A Modern Brigand

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Miss Bayle's Romance"

LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823
R123m
v.3

W. H. SMITH & SON'S

SUBSCRIPTION LIBRARY,

186, STRAND, LONDON,

AND AT THE RAILWAY BOOKSTALLS.

NOVELS ARE ISSUED TO AND RECEIVED FROM SUBSCRIBERS IN SETS ONLY.

TERMS.

FOR SUBSCRIBERS OBTAINING THEIR BOOKS FROM A COUNTRY BOOKSTALL—

	6 Months.	12 Months.
For ONE Volume at a time	£0 12 0	1 1 0
(Novels in more than One Volume are not available for this class of Subscription.)		
For TWO Volumes ,, ...	0 17 6	1 11 6
(Novels in more than Two Volumes are not available for this class of Subscription.)		
For THREE Volumes ,, ...	1 3 0	2 2 0
For FOUR ,, ,, ...	1 8 0	2 10 0
For SIX ,, ,, ...	1 15 0	3 3 0
For TWELVE ,, ,, ...	3 0 0	5 5 0

'I turn my back on thy detested walls,
Proud city, and thy sons I leave behind,
A selfish, sordid, money-getting kind.'

'O money, money, how blindly thou hast been worshipped, and how stupidly abused! Thou art health and liberty and strength: and he that has thee may rattle his pockets at the Devil.'—CHARLES LAMB.

A MODERN BRIGAND.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

'MISS BAYLE'S ROMANCE.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

III.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.
1888.

[*All Rights Reserved.*]

823
R123m
v.3

CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

CHAPTER XXV.

Out of the Toils.

	PAGE
Retaliation dreaded	3
A chivalrous Brigand	5
Two happy Husbands	7
A howling Mob at the Door	9
A touching Scene	11
A generous Brigand	13
Carlo's Account	15
Mr. Argoll's Reflections	17
Prepares to Start	19
I am a Christian	21
Torturing Captives	23
The Funeral Service	25
Ransom or Death	27
Brigands and Financiers	29
Mr. Argoll checkmated	31
Diamond cut Diamond	33
That is all Right	35
Return to Catania	37
A startling Surprise	39
'Oh, the Blackguard!'	41

CHAPTER XXVI.

At Westbourne and Naples.

	PAGE
Back in the Gran Bretagna - - -	43
Mr. Byker's Successor - - - -	45
A Newspaper Story - - - -	47
How the Story originated - - -	49
A fabulous Hero - - - - -	51
Painful Uncertainty - - - -	53
Mr. Argoll's Letter - - - -	55
Poor Mrs Byker! - - - -	57
Berta goes to Brixton Park - - -	59
A sad Meeting - - - - -	61
The Doctor sent for - - - -	63
A serious Case - - - - -	65
A peaceful End - - - - -	67
How Mr. Argoll took the News - - -	69
Miss Tacon's Grievances - - - -	71
A Budget of Gossip - - - -	73

CHAPTER XXVII.

A Trip to Naples and Back.

Business on the Brain - - - -	77
Mr. Bandol's Start in Life - - -	79
An old Man of the Sea - - - -	81
Mr. Argoll's Condition - - - -	83
Conflicting Views - - - -	85
Self-reliant and Self-possessed - - -	87
Weeping Maidens - - - -	89
Unkind Speeches - - - - -	91
Travelling in Comfort - - - -	93
Miss Solar joins Mr. Argoll - - -	95

PAGE
This is Beautiful! - - - - 97
Moral Reflections - - - - 99
Two Classes of Newspapers - - - 101
Painful Memories - - - - 103
Comparing Notes - - - - 105
The Matin-hour in Bond Street - - - 107
Mr. Argoll Sight-seeing - - - - 109
Mr. Palestine's Mission - - - - 111
News from South America - - - 113

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Back in the City.

Husband and Wife - - - - 115
A dismal Dinner-party - - - - 117
So he is not drowned! - - - - 119
Mr. Henry's Letter - - - - 121
A mysterious Statement - - - - 123
Mr. Byker missed - - - - 125
The true Policy - - - - - 127
Providence and Millionaires - - - 129
We are all proud of him - - - - 131
Where is your Medicine-chest? - - - 133
Mrs. Argoll and her Niece - - - 135
Miss Solar's Troubles - - - - 137
Master greatly improved - - - - 139
Groundless Suspicions - - - - 141
Letter to Aunt Irma - - - - 143
A good Resolution - - - - 145

CHAPTER XXIX.

News from Patagonia.

Conventional Christianity - - - 147
Christmas at Palace Gardens - - - 149

PAGE
An unpleasant Conversation - - - 151
Revolution in Patagonia - - - 153
An obscure Telegram - - - - 155
Patagonians at Home - - - - 157
An enterprising Widow - - - - 159
An uninteresting Country - - - 161
Curing Headaches - - - - 163
Magnificent Sunsets - - - - 165
Mr. Pendragon's Opinion - - - - 167
Effect on Mr. Argoll - - - - 169
Lord John's Return - - - - 171
Unscrupulous Financiers - - - - 173

CHAPTER XXX.

More Love-making.

Lovers in the Conservatory - - - 177
The Guest of the Evening - - - 179
Lord John changed - - - - 181
The Charms of Music - - - - 183
So she is Independent - - - - 185
Amateur Doctors - - - - 187
Industrious Miss Tacon - - - - 189
'I was Sick of the Place' - - - 191
Will you marry me? - - - - 193
What is the Matter? - - - - 195
Lord John's Reflections - - - - 197
Matrimony at its Best - - - - 199
A regular Trump - - - - - 201
A magnanimous Suitor - - - - 203
A Rise in the World - - - - 205
A Wedding announced - - - - 207
Miss Solar's Despair - - - 209

CHAPTER XXXI.

A Struggle for Life.

PAGE
Unpleasant Speeches - - - - 213
A nice little Speech - - - - 215
Financing and Painting - - - - 217
Not a Fortune-Hunter - - - - 219
Fraternal squabbling - - - - 221
A true Story - - - - - 223
Planning a Visit to Sicily - - - 225
Miss Solar does not object - - - 227
An Errand of Vengeance - - - - 229
Modern Rome - - - - - 231
A Child rescued - - - - - 233
Chasing the Brigand Chief - - - 235
An unexpected Visitor - - - - 237
The Brigand's Story - - - - 239
The little Enrico - - - - 241
A Brigand's Gratitude - - - - 243
The End of Carlo - - - - 245

CHAPTER XXXII.

Knots Untied.

Eruption of Mount Etna - - - - 247
Nicata overwhelmed - - - - 249
Financial Magicians - - - - 251
A Candidate for a Peerage - - - 253
Miss Solar disconsolate - - - - 255
The Angel of Death - - - - 257
Mr. Henry re-appears - - - - 259
A detestable Hole - - - - 261
Account of the Journey - - - - 263

PAGE
Temples of Mammon and Fame - - - 265
Will you paint my Portrait? - - - 267
Pictures on Bank Notes - - - - 269
Visits Palace Gardens - - - - 271
'How happy should I be!' - - - 273
'It is best as it is' - - - - 275

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

Impediments to Marriage - - - 277
A painful Courtship - - - - 279
Circumstances alter Cases - - - 281
Making and spending Money - - - 283
Ways and Means - - - - 285
A Pair of Simpletons - - - - 287
Bewildered Lovers - - - - 289
Hand over the Cheque - - - - 291
Taking Care of Money - - - - 293
Women's Fancies - - - - 295
A gloomy Prospect - - - - 297
Henry Argoll 'turned off' - - - 299
Off to the North Pole - - - - 301
A horrible Woman - - - - 303
A speaking Likeness - - - - 305

A MODERN BRIGAND.

CHAPTER XXV.

OUT OF THE TOILS.

'Now will I show myself to have more of the serpent
Than the dove; that is, more knave than fool.'

MARLOWE.

CARLO NERONE, like many other Sicilians, was no believer in the sanctity of human life. He had as little scruple about killing a man as about killing a fly; but he would not kill either a man or a fly unless enraged or irritated.

He thought that life was an evil which should be ended without unnecessary delay

when any human being caused him personal inconvenience, and that death was the fitting penalty for the person who, in his opinion, was a cumberer of the ground. He was a genuine utilitarian, and an active agent, according to his lights, in ensuring the survival of the fittest. The drawback of natural selection, as practised by him, was that unfortunate and unintended mistakes might occur now and then.

That suffering should follow from his rash and ill-considered action gave Carlo little concern. He might have said, if challenged for a scientific explanation and capable of giving it, that suffering was the rule in a world which the human race enters without any desire to appear therein, and manifests an unphilosophical repugnance to leave at a moment's notice. No trustworthy statistics are extant as to the number of persons who had prematurely quitted this world owing to the action of Carlo Nerone. He was satisfied, however, that he had always tried to hold the balance true, and to act as a terrestrial providence for his own advantage.

Others before Mr. Byker had lost their lives in the same way as he, without Carlo feeling the least surprise or experiencing any remorse. If he gained anything by a murder, he was pleased; if he lost nothing by it, he did not care. For the first time in his life he was horrified at the sight of two men engulfed in the *Inferno* before his eyes. He dreaded lest his own existence should be imperilled owing to their deaths.

In Sicily, as in Corsica, men who shed blood are liable to be killed at any moment by the relatives of the victims. Though Carlo had not planned Pietro's death, and though he sincerely regretted it, he was apprehensive lest it should be attributed to him; and lest, being held responsible for it, he might be slain by way of punishment and compensation. Murderers and brigands have an intense desire to enjoy life. They fear to die chiefly because they exist in terror of the devil. They account their own lives very precious. Carlo trembled at the thought of having to face his widowed sister; and what was still worse, Pietro's younger brother Giovanni.

He did not know that Giovanni had been a witness of the catastrophe, having returned to the hut after the others had left it, and watched the flight, the chase, and its tragic ending. Giovanni hastened with the sad news to his sister-in-law.

Pietro was very popular in Nicata. He had not been absent from it so long as Carlo, and his period of service in the army had left him as thorough and prejudiced a Sicilian as any of his neighbours. He was a brigand who delighted to do his duty with punctuality and despatch; in other words, he never hesitated to take the lives of those who neither could nor would pay the sum asked by way of ransom. If a brigand once allows the promptings of mercy to influence him, there is an end to his usefulness. His task consists, first, in making rich men prisoners; second, in making them disgorge a large sum of money; and third, in despatching them if they obstinately refrain from paying their captors a suitable remuneration for their trouble.

Pietro had often to labour diligently with his

hands, and to go exhausted to bed when rich strangers were scarce. He felt it hard if a stranger who could pay declined to do so, and he considered that he was subserving the design of Providence in giving a recalcitrant captive a lesson as well as a punishment by cutting off his fingers and toes, his nose and ears, and ending matters by cutting his throat, or inveigling him into the *Inferno*. He would have considered himself insulted if he had been stigmatized as a butcher. In his own opinion he was executing a good work, as well as continuing the glorious tradition of his craft, by ridding the world of those who would not pay their ransom when they fell into his power. If they could not, they were deemed still less worthy to live.

Many persons in Nicata looked upon Pietro as the incarnation of chivalry. He never lifted his hand against a woman, and he never hesitated to stab or shoot a man whom he had injured. He was feared as well as admired. There was no nonsense about him, if such a phrase may be employed by way of translating the equally idiomatic Italian one

which his many admirers used to employ. When Carlo Nerone returned from his travels, resuscitated the band of valiant brigands of which his father had been chief, and appointed Pietro his second in command, it was the general opinion that Pietro would do honour to his calling, and might even surpass his chief on momentous occasions. The forecast had been justified. A bolder, more unscrupulous and bloodthirsty brigand than Pietro had not been known in Nicata since the lamentable death in prison of Carlo's esteemed father.

It is easy to imagine what a blank was occasioned when this accomplished and exemplary brigand lost his life. Pietro's death fell upon the village like a thunder-clap. He had presided the evening before at the feast which was held to celebrate the restoration to health of the rich Englishman, whose enforced gift was to make them all richer than they had ever been before. It was supposed that Carlo's share would not be small; but, as he had contracted the bad habit since being in England of keeping his

own counsel, no one knew how much he was to receive. If any of them had known the amount, Carlo would have been rendered uncomfortable. He quite understood his position and its chances, and he did not confide his secrets to a soul. His own wife knew nothing of his plans and expectations. This was politic on his part. Had she been called to bear witness concerning him, she would have had nothing to tell to his detriment, because she was really ignorant of his movements and calculations.

Pietro and Carlo had become happy husbands on the same day. The wedding festivities were carried out at their joint expense. Their wives were bosom friends. If they had any quarrel, it was over a matter for which neither was responsible. Both hoped to be mothers of young brigands, but Carlo's wife had a son, whilst Pietro's child was a daughter. Pietro's wife was envious of her sister-in-law for a few days, and then they both resumed their habits of affectionate intercourse.

Pietro's partisans continued to say as much

as they could in his praise, and as much as they dared in disparagement of his chief. Pietro rebuked them for speaking harshly of Carlo, yet he did not disrelish their eulogiums.

If anyone had even hinted that Carlo had a hand in Pietro's death, Carlo would have been stabbed to the heart before an hour had elapsed. The brigands never shot each other or strangers when a knife would do the work of a bullet. Gunpowder was dear, and they did not like to waste it. They were economical by necessity as much as on principle. A single knife, well sharpened, would kill a man as effectually as a bullet, and it might be used for years. There is no use wasting powder and shot when cold steel will serve the purpose.

A Sicilian brigand is as attentive as an English millionaire to ways and means. He will not waste money unnecessarily, even when committing murder. Perhaps, if he were a little less niggardly, he would make his money go much farther. But he hesitates about spending it upon weapons of the newest

pattern. The old flint gun with which his father shot down policemen who pursued him, or killed prisoners who would not pay ransom, is still regarded by him as a serviceable weapon. Very few of them possess revolvers. Pietro and Carlo were amongst the exceptions. Their comrades were afraid of handling and being exposed to weapons which shot so often and so quickly. The knowledge that Carlo possessed two revolvers and a repeating-rifle which he could fire fifteen times in succession, made his followers treat him as a superior being, and dread incurring his wrath. He knew their feelings, and he thought that if he had the opportunity of availing himself of his revolver and his repeating-rifle he might face all his followers in rebellion. He breathed freely after he reached his hotel and had assured himself that his deadly weapons were loaded. A few minutes later a howling mob was at the door.

Mr. Argoll trembled, but he was not so uneasy as Carlo. The latter knew his countrymen, and feared for his life; the former had no inkling of what might happen, and

such a case is one of those in which ignorance is tranquillizing. Besides, he was unaware of what was said. Carlo's dread subsided, and he was entirely reassured when he learnt what the mob meant. There was no wish or intention to kill him; but it was intimated in menacing tones that if the Englishman, meaning Mr. Argoll, did not pay his ransom speedily, he would be sent after Pietro and Mr. Byker. Till then Carlo had not realized the impression which the death of Pietro had made in the village. He was now perfectly cool, genial and delighted.

Opening the door, Carlo went forth to meet his fellow-villagers. He assumed the air of one struggling against a great grief; he spoke a few words, then his voice failed him, and he sobbed aloud. The others melted into tears, and no one could utter an articulate word for several minutes. Carlo was the first to regain self-possession, and then he addressed the crowd to this effect:

'My poor and honoured friends, I shall never forget the loss of the good Pietro. I

loved him as my own brother. I feel his loss as much as my sister, his unhappy widow, must do. I cannot think how I shall exist now he is gone.' Again he broke down; Pietro's widow began to cry more bitterly than before, and Giovanni, the brother of Pietro, seemed in an agony of grief. It was a touching scene. These honest and bereaved brigands appeared devoted to each other. The only man who was not deeply affected was Mr. Argoll. He looked on in as stolid a fashion as a man may do when the house of the neighbour whom he hates is on fire.

Carlo recovered, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say he never quite lost his coolness, whilst the others were still beside themselves with grief. He continued his address, to the following effect:

'The Englishman tells us that he will pay his ransom.' A chorus of sounds which, in English, would be termed loud applause, greeted this announcement. Mr. Argoll was cheered to the echo. Carlo continued: 'Each of you will have his share; but I undertake

to double the amount promised, and Pietro's widow will get a thousand lire as her portion.'

This generosity softened and won all hearts. Pietro's widow was enchanted. She had never possessed one hundred lire in her life, and to obtain a thousand was equivalent to being rich beyond her utmost hopes. She did not know—indeed, she could not know, for her deceased husband had kept it a secret, with a view of giving her a pleasant surprise—that he would have received twenty-five thousand lire in the event of the ransom demanded from the English captives being paid.

'You, my poor and trusty Giovanni,' Carlo went on to say, 'will receive a thousand also.' Giovanni was taken aback at his master's generosity, and felt less regret than he should have done at his brother's untimely end. The climax came when, with a knowledge of his associates which rendered him worthy to be their chief, Carlo added:

'I mean to give a thousand lire out of my small share to the good father, our priest, to

say masses for the repose of Pietro's soul; and I shall give him a hundred to perform a service for the dead near the spot where he was last seen in life.'

Everybody was half crying, half applauding when Carlo ceased to speak.

'How good!'—'How gracious!'—'How considerate!' were the phrases which issued from their lips. Pietro's widow rushed forward and kissed her generous-hearted brother; Giovanni did so also; the others wished to follow suit, when he motioned them back, saying, 'I must now go and settle matters with the Englishman.'

There was little mourning in the village that night.

Carlo was puzzled: he could not understand why the news of Pietro's death should have produced so slight an impression. Had he been acquainted with the facts, he would have been spared much uneasiness. It sometimes happens, however, that even a brigand chief, or an hotel-keeper, may be mistaken in his calculation. Carlo Nerone had disquieted himself without reason.

He did not know how the news of Pietro's death had been received by his widow. Giovanni, her brother-in-law, did not resort to any periphrasis in announcing the doleful tidings to her; but he said, as soon as he saw her:

'Poor Pietro has disappeared in the *Inferno;*' he continued: 'The tall English mylor has gone down there too;' Mr. Byker being known as the tall Englishman, and some supposed him to be the wealthy one.

Pietro's widow was shocked. If Giovanni had said that the Englishman had forced Pietro in, and been the cause of his death, she would have at once called for vengeance upon the murderer and his friends; as it was, she asked Giovanni to give her full particulars of how the catastrophe had occurred. He related what he had seen; he added that the master, meaning Carlo Nerone, had appeared to be overwhelmed at the sad spectacle, and she never thought of laying her husband's death at Carlo's door. Had Giovanni even hinted that Carlo was to blame, Pietro's widow would have

demanded his life as a sacrifice. Though his sister, she would never have forgiven him. As it was, she and her neighbours agreed that they could do nothing more than proceed to the hotel, and learn what Carlo purposed to do next. When they assembled before it, and made Carlo feel uncomfortable, they were howling out of grief, and not for vengeance.

Carlo related his version of the facts to Mr. Argoll, who listened to the narrative with dismay.

'What happened,' he said, 'was that your clerk—whom I used to suppose to be you, and who was taken away by Pietro when the brigands surrounded the house—left the hut before Pietro and I reached it this morning. We went to bring him here, as was agreed to last night. At first we could not think what had happened to him, and the guards whom Pietro had placed over the hut had gone home. Perhaps they had heard that the Englishman in the hut was not the rich one. Well, then, we looked about, and saw Mr. Byker at the other side of the valley; I

called to him to stop, but instead of doing so, he began to run. Pietro and I ran after him, and when I saw the direction he was taking, I called out again to warn him, but he only ran the faster. The brave Pietro made a desperate effort, and got up to him just as he reached the mouth of a great hole in the ground which the people here think goes down to the middle of the earth, and which they call the *Inferno*. It was then too late to stop Mr. Byker, and in trying to save him Pietro was dragged down, and both are big cinders now.'

'But what can have made Byker run away?' was the question which Mr. Argoll put, and to which Carlo could not give an answer.

'It seems very suspicious,' was Mr. Argoll's comment. 'Indeed, it looks as if Mr. Byker wanted to leave me in the lurch; yet he has got the worst of it now, and I suppose his old mother will torment me about him. However, he ought to have saved enough for her to live upon, so she will get over it soon.'

Mr. Argoll said this in a low tone, as

if speaking to himself, whilst Carlo stood by, not making any sign that he heard what was said or cared to understand what it meant. Mr. Argoll's reflections were not creditable, yet they were quite characteristic. He owed much to Mr. Byker, and even if he had been a complete stranger to him, his sudden and tragic death might have excited his compassion.

Instead of grieving for his clerk, he was thankful that he was not in Mr. Byker's place. Edmund Burke, in his 'Letter to a Noble Lord,' writes that 'nothing can be conceived more hard than the heart of a thoroughbred metaphysician. It comes nearer to the cold malignity of a wicked spirit than to the frailty and passion of a man. It is like that of the principle of evil itself, incorporeal, true, unmixed, dephlegmated, defecated evil.' A modern millionaire of the type of Mr. Argoll is no better than the City men of Burke's day, of whom he said that their ledger was their Bible, and that Mammon was their God. Neither is such a man any better than the thoroughbred meta-

physician whom Burke pilloried. Indeed, he whose life has been spent in making money in the City, whose only ambition is to be richer than his fellows, to whom the acquisition of wealth represents the sole aim and end of existence, cannot cherish any of the finer sympathies of humanity. He is an animated money-making machine, which has not much more resemblance to a human being than Babbage's Calculating Machine. It is absurd to look for feeling in a mass of steel or a set of iron wheels and rods; and if Mr. Argoll did not manifest any pity for his unfortunate clerk, it was because he was not much softer or more impressionable than a piece of iron or steel.

'Oh!' he suddenly exclaimed, after a moment's reflection, 'are you quite certain that Mr. Byker's body cannot be got out?'

'No, sir; any person who goes down the *Inferno* disappears altogether, though sometimes a glimpse may be had of the body as it is slowly falling to pieces under the heat. One has to stand on a high spot and look

down, because, if one goes too near, one is suffocated with the smoke.'

'What a misfortune,' said Mr. Argoll, in a tone of deeper feeling than he had yet shown. 'My clerk had most of the money with him; he must have had two hundred pounds in circular notes of the London and Westminster Bank, and if he has disappeared they must have gone too. How vexatious! Indeed, it was too bad of Byker carrying this money away with him.'

Carlo quite agreed with Mr. Argoll. If he had known that Mr. Byker had such a sum in his possession he would have taken greater precautions to prevent him running off. He, too, began to feel and lament Mr. Byker's loss quite as keenly as Mr. Argoll.

The conversation ceased on Carlo's being called away. Mr. Argoll commenced putting his things in order, as he purposed quitting Nicata on the following day. Now that Pietro, the brigand chief, was dead, he fancied that there would not be any further attempt made to detain him and to exact ransom. He was glad that the brigand who

stood on guard outside the window of his room and the other who stood outside the hotel door had both disappeared. Besides, he observed that Carlo walked about unmolested, so he inferred that he need not be any longer uneasy about brigands. Thus thinking, he was the more anxious to get away before they reappeared.

He had a good appetite for dinner, and his spirits rose; he seemed quite able to undertake the journey to Catania, and he told Carlo to have his bill prepared and to engage a carriage for him the next day.

'I do not think, sir, that you should start to-morrow; but you may do so the following day.'

'What's the matter now? Surely there is nothing to hinder my leaving! I've got money enough to pay your bill, though I shall never forgive Byker for not leaving those circular notes behind him.'

Carlo was glad to hear that Mr. Argoll had some ready-money left; he feared lest Mr. Byker had kept the purse. Instead of referring to this, he said:

'Of course you shall have your bill, sir, as soon as it is made out. But when I said you might stay over to-morrow, I meant that a funeral service is to be held as near the mouth of the *Inferno* as possible; and though you do not care for these things, as you are not a Christian, still, the people here would consider it a mark of respect if you were present.'

'I am a Christian,' replied Mr. Argoll, 'though I am not a Roman Catholic, if that's what you mean.'

Now Carlo had been trained, like other Sicilians, not to regard any person as a Christian who did not belong to the Church of Rome, and he meant no offence by his speech to Mr. Argoll. The latter was not disposed to stay; he did not understand the use of the service, still less did he see the need of his attending it; but his opinion underwent a change when Carlo added:

'I suppose the police will come and investigate this affair, and it will not look well, seeing that you have no passport, for them to hear that you rushed away

and even refused to be present at the funeral service.'

'What nonsense!' was Mr. Argoll's peevish remark. When he reflected, however, that by attending this service he might save himself from being troubled by the police and suspected of brigandage or murder, he consented to stay.

He continued to converse with Carlo, the subject of brigandage forming the staple of their talk, being the one which had the most interest for him.

'These rascals did not give you much trouble this time,' was his remark to Carlo, which he followed up by the question, 'Have you ever suffered anything from them? Are they so cruel as people say? Are not the stories greatly exaggerated?'

Carlo overlooked, though he did not pardon, the first words which Mr. Argoll uttered, and he went on to frighten him as much as he could, his object being to prepare the way for another and a peremptory application for ransom.

'It is not very long ago,' he said, in an im-

pressive tone, 'since I was taken prisoner in Calabria and suffered frightful tortures. I was gagged; my arms were tied; I was forced to go up a steep road where I stumbled at every step, and afterwards I had to lie on the ground without food.'

'But how did you get away?'

'Why, I had the option of paying a fixed ransom, and I happened to have a sufficient sum with me, or else I should have been thrown over a precipice. But the brigands of Calabria are far behind those of Sicily. We—I mean the brigands—have made many improvements here in treating prisoners. They torture them scientifically. Poor Pietro was very fond of drawing the teeth of those who refused to pay, and he used to boast, at least so I have heard, that he knew how to make the operation very painful by twisting the teeth out slowly. His brother, Giovanni, who will probably succeed him, has a preference for cutting off ears and noses, fingers and toes, one after the other, and he puts boiling pitch on the wounds to stop bleeding and make them more painful.'

'Oh! the monster. Surely the police, who seem to be so particular, according to you, about people who have no passports, ought to hunt them down.'

'Other persons who have fallen into their hands have said the same thing, sir; but perhaps you don't know that there is a secret society in Sicily called the *Maffia*, and those who belong to it are seldom troubled by the police; and both the chiefs of the police and most of the brigands are members of it.'

'I never heard of that society,' remarked Mr. Argoll; 'but the Government ought to put it down.'

'I have often heard that said, too, but I don't think the Government will find it easy. However, I hear my wife calling me, so I must now leave you and say "Good-night." I shall tell you early in the morning at what time the service is to be held.'

Mr. Argoll noticed that there was a greater freedom of manner about Carlo than when he first met him. He spoke as if he were the master, and could order his guests about as he pleased. Mr. Argoll did not like being

dictated to, and he resolved to let Carlo understand this, and he half repented him of having promised to attend the service. 'Yet, after all,' he said to himself, 'it is better that I should go. The affair may get into the papers, and it will look well if I am present.' Mr. Argoll stood in greater fear of a newspaper—in other words, of public opinion—than of God or the Devil.

The funeral service for Pietro was not an imposing ceremony, yet it had an element of grandeur. The venerable parish priest took up a place as near as he could with safety to the mouth of the *Inferno;* his parishioners were grouped behind him. Pietro's widow was loud in her lamentation, and the women present wailed in unison. After the ceremony was over, all the men who had guns, and most of them were armed, fired them off. This was a custom of the district which had prevailed since the introduction of firearms, but which is not practised in other parts of Sicily.

Mr. Argoll felt relieved when the ceremony was ended. When all the people knelt down

he was disposed to stand by way of protest, either against the service itself or against the form of religion which the priest professed. Carlo whispered to him that if he did not kneel one of the young men would thrust a knife into him, and then some of the others would cast him into the *Inferno*, so he instantly adopted kneeling as an attitude of discretion. The armed men, after reloading their guns, escorted him to the hotel, which some of them entered, and one of them, Giovanni, followed him into his room. Mr. Argoll was surprised and uneasy. He had not long to wait before learning what was expected of him.

Carlo entered the room and said :

'Mr. Argoll, you will have to make up your mind either to pay the ransom at once or take the consequences. The brigands are furious. If Pietro had died and Mr. Byker had escaped they would have killed him on the spot, but as they do not think you had a hand in Pietro's death they have agreed to spare your life provided you pay the ransom. This is his brother,

Giovanni, who has succeeded to the leadership.'

'But what do they want? I thought that I was not to have any more trouble with them, now that Byker and Pietro have gone down that infernal hole. Didn't they look upon Byker as the man who had all the money?'

'They did so, but they have found out their mistake, and they say that they are very sorry Mr. Byker took so much money away with him. Happily, Pietro had nothing of value about him, so his death is not so serious a loss as your clerk's.'

'What is it they want, then?'

'They either mean to have a pledge that you will pay ten thousand pounds, and Giovanni will never leave you till you have handed over the money; or, if you refuse, they will carry you away and send you after Pietro and Mr. Byker, but they will take your clothes off first, in case there might be money in your pockets.'

'Oh, the brutes! But I cannot get ten thousand pounds, even if I could afford to

part with so much money if I had it. How do they know I've got anything?'

'If you say you haven't any money,' replied Carlo, with a perceptible sneer, 'I will translate this to Giovanni and the others.'

Calling to the brigands who crowded round the door, he said a few words. When he had finished, Giovanni stepped forward and seized Mr. Argoll, being aided by the others, and they began to take, or rather to tear, his clothes off.

'What do they mean to do?' he cried out.

'They are going to strip you, and then carry you and throw you down the *Inferno;* I have tried to pacify them, but it's no use.'

'Tell them to stop; I will pay the money; but they shall suffer for it afterwards, the villains!'

At a sign they ceased stripping him, and Carlo said aloud:

'I am in danger also, Mr. Argoll; for, after despatching you, they will take all I have and then set fire to the house. But I advise you, for your own sake, not to threaten

to do anything afterwards. Some of them guess what you mean, and all of them expect you to have your revenge if you can; but take my advice and keep cool now.'

'It's all very well for you to speak about keeping cool; but I am not used to this treatment. Oh! why did I ever leave London? There are no brigands in the City.'

'We need not discuss that now, sir, but I have read in your papers that some of your financiers are as great brigands as those of my country, only I hope that you are not one of them.'

'We never put people down an *Inferno,* as you call it.'

'No; but I heard a man once say that the brigands of your City, who are there called financiers, make it a hell upon earth for many people.'

Whilst Mr. Argoll and Carlo carried on this conversation, the brigands had dispersed; Giovanni remained, however, and he addressed a few words to Carlo, who said to Mr. Argoll:

'Giovanni insists upon your writing out

an order at once for the ten thousand pounds, and handing it to him. When he has got it he will allow you to go off, and he will escort you as far as Catania. He also says that he does not object to my accompanying you.'

'Of course I shall be glad of your company,' said Mr. Argoll, 'as I can't speak the infernal lingo, and I shouldn't know how to get on with the rascally people whom I might meet on the way.'

Carlo was too astute to display any annoyance at the uncomplimentary terms which Mr. Argoll applied to his mother tongue and his countrymen. He was as resigned as Uriah Heep to being insulted, provided he received an adequate compensation, and in this case he expected to receive a sufficient number of hard coins to make amends for all these hard words.

'How does this scoundrel know,' asked Mr. Argoll, 'that I can get any banker in Catania to give money in exchange for my order?'

'I cannot tell you, sir; all I can say is that he tells me you can get that sum from a bank

in Catania at any moment, and he will be quite satisfied with your order.'

'And how in the name of heaven can he have learned that?' said Mr. Argoll. Indeed, he was startled to hear this. 'No one,' he went on to say, 'but Byker knew this, and I cannot believe that Byker was in league with these accursed brigands.'

He did poor Mr. Byker a cruel injustice; but he probably spoke in his haste, and did not really mean to impute to that excellent and only too faithful servant a charge which he was the last man to deserve. However, the statement had the effect of making Mr. Argoll feel himself checkmated, or, as he was wont to express it, 'in a hole.'

'Well, Mr. Nerone,' he said, after a short pause, 'I suppose there is no help for it. Give me pen, ink, and paper, and I will write the order, which you can translate to that ruffian.'

'As I do not wish to be accused of misleading you, sir,' said Carlo, in a sanctimonious tone, 'you had better follow your own impulse, and not act upon any advice from me.

As I have told you, I may suffer also; but if you choose to pay a little more than I should charge you for accommodation here, I don't mind running the risk, and also giving you a hint as to how to get the better of that "ruffian," as you call him.'

'Can you really? If you only tell me how to trick him, I don't mind making a sacrifice. I have about three hundred pounds left out of the five hundred which I brought with me; that fellow Byker had two hundred of them when he went to blazes—and I shall gladly let you have two hundred in payment of your bill, on condition that you show me how to get off paying this preposterous ransom.'

To cheat the brigand whilst professing to accept his terms was one of those feats in which Mr. Argoll took delight. Carlo was not less pleased to make sure of two hundred pounds in ready money; his bill could not have amounted to more than fifty, according to the conditions which he laid down the day that Mr. Argoll and Mr. Byker took up their abode in his hotel.

Carlo's counsel to Mr. Argoll was as follows:

'First write the order, let me see it, and then I will translate it to Giovanni. Should he distrust me he may go to someone else to learn if it be correct before releasing you, so that there is no use in writing one which the bankers could not act upon at once. But you can at the same time write a note to the bankers which I shall deliver before the order is presented to them; the police will then be called in, and Giovanni will be arrested.'

'That's a capital suggestion,' exclaimed Mr. Argoll. He added in a cheery tone, 'If you should come to London, Mr. Nerone, you shall have a place in my office. You are the very man for me, and I am sure you will find it far pleasanter to live in London on a good salary than to remain here amongst these cut-throats.'

Carlo did not thank Mr. Argoll, or take any notice of his offer. The latter did not wait for him to say anything; and he wrote an order to this effect:

'Pay the bearer the equivalent in Italian money to ten thousand pounds sterling.

'J. M. Argoll.'

This was the form agreed upon by Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc before Mr. Argoll and Mr. Byker left Paris. As his custom was in such a case, Mr. Argoll asked Mr. Byker to copy the words for future use. His illness had affected his memory, and he could not now recall them. But Carlo helped him by repeating the words, which, in order to end the discussion, Mr. Argoll copied. It was in conversation with Mr. Byker, whilst Mr. Argoll lay on a sick-bed, that Carlo learned from him the form for obtaining money from a banking firm in Catania, wherewith to arrange for making a railway up Mount Etna. Mr. Argoll's signature, as well as a copy of the form, had been forwarded to Messrs. Palmaro and Vilani, the object being to enable a payment to be made without question, in the probable event of there being a pressing need for the sum being paid without inquiry or delay. At the same

time he wrote a short note, addressed to the bankers, which ran as follows:

'GENTLEMEN,

'I have given a brigand an order on you for ten thousand pounds. When he presents the order, please send for the police and have him arrested. I wrote the order under compulsion, and I do not wish you to honour it.'

He handed this to Carlo, who, after reading it, said to himself: '*Siamo a cavallo,*' meaning,—'Now I'm all right,'—and then said aloud:

'That must be delivered before the order. They know me, and will attend to what I say.'

'Many thanks, Mr. Nerone; you are really a first-rate fellow. I shall never forget your kindness.'

'I deserve no thanks, sir. I am only doing my duty; and it is a pleasure to serve a real gentleman like you,' was Carlo's modest reply.

The party started early the following day in a carriage which was engaged for the

purpose. Carlo and Mr. Argoll sat inside, whilst Giovanni sat beside the driver. Giovanni appeared to be unarmed. Mr. Argoll noticed this, and mentioned it to Carlo, who replied:

'It is true that he has left his gun behind him; but he has got his long knife concealed under his clothes; and if he were to suspect you of playing him false, he would stab you to the heart. The older brigands seldom carry pistols, and they do not understand how to use revolvers. Besides, the knife has the advantage of making no noise, and despatching a man with perfect certainty when properly used.'

Mr. Argoll was not disposed, after hearing this, to do anything at which Giovanni might take umbrage. He spoke little during the journey; and when the carriage was stopped to water and feed the horses, he kept as close to Carlo and as far from Giovanni as he could. He did not like Giovanni's looks, and he trembled lest he should draw and plunge his long and sharp knife into him.

When Catania was reached the party

drove to the principal hotel. It was late in the evening, and, as Carlo sensibly remarked, the bank would then be closed, so it was no use going there till the morning. He offered to deliver Mr. Argoll's note as soon as the bank's doors were opened in the morning. At half-past nine Carlo came to Mr. Argoll's room and said :

'I am going to await the opening of the bank at ten, and I shall hand your note to the senior partner before anyone else can be served, so there will be no chance of the order which Giovanni has got being paid. I run a great risk, as you may suppose. If Giovanni were to suspect me I should be stabbed on the spot. If he thinks you know what has been done, you will as certainly be stabbed also ; so I advise you to keep indoors to-day, and I shall return to Nicata immediately after delivering your note.'

'You are most considerate, Mr. Nerone, and I really do not know how to thank you sufficiently. As I said before, if you care to come to London and settle there, I shall be able to make you some return for what you

have done for me. Pray think this over; and now good-bye.'

For the first time since making his acquaintance, he shook Carlo by the hand. The latter appreciated the compliment, and assured Mr. Argoll that he should always be most welcome at the *Hôtel des Étrangers* in Nicata, and that, if he ever visited London, he would not omit to remind him of his promise. They both parted with apparent feelings of esteem for each other. Mr. Argoll said to himself: 'It is a great comfort to have met that Nerone; I like him so much that I should be sorry if he were stabbed by that brute, Giovanni.'

Being slightly uneasy, Mr. Argoll engaged a guide and went to the bank in the afternoon. He found it shut earlier than usual, the day being a holiday. On the following morning he returned and saw Signor Palmaro, who said in excellent English:

'Our valued correspondents have written to us about you, and we are most pleased to make the personal acquaintance of so distinguished a financier. Let me hope

that you have enjoyed your visit to Sicily, and that you will stay a few days here and partake of my modest hospitality.'

'Many thanks for your kind wishes and offer,' was Mr. Argoll's reply. He was gratified to find that no interpreter was required. He continued: 'But I am now anxious to get home as soon as possible. I have not been well, and I cannot say that I have enjoyed myself.'

'Perhaps, then, you will not require to draw upon us for more money; but we are quite at your service if you should do so.' Making a profound bow, he added: 'We have never before been honoured by serving so distinguished a client.'

'Draw upon you for more money! What can you mean? I have no use now for the ten thousand pounds at my credit. Of course, the order which I gave under compulsion has not been cashed. I sent a note explaining the matter, but so long as the money is safe I do not care to prosecute the scoundrelly brigand.'

'You are under a misapprehension, my dear

sir,' was the reply, which was spoken in a courteous tone.

Then, calling to a clerk, Signor Palmaro said :

'Did not we pay away ten thousand pounds in Italian money yesterday, to the landlord of that hotel at Nicata ? I forget his name.'

'Yes, sir ; we did. Signor Nerone presented the order, which was in Mr. Argoll's handwriting, and you may remember you carefully compared it with the form sent from Paris, and you found them to correspond in every particular.'

Mr. Argoll stood aghast. He could scarcely trust his ears. He exclaimed :

'It was a rascal called Giovanni to whom I was forced to give the order ; but I sent a note by Mr. Nerone, saying that you were not to pay the money.'

'We know nothing about that, my dear sir. It is Signor Nerone whom we believe to be at the head of a band of brigands, only we dare not say so publicly, as he has so many friends amongst the *Maffia*. This man entraps strangers in his hotel at Nicata. It

was he who got the money. Giovanni is probably one of his followers, and simply carrying out his orders.'

'Oh, the blackguard!—the consummate blackguard! So I have been done, after all. That infernal plausible landlord has victimized me! And I was fool enough to think him an honest man!'

Mr. Argoll went on in this strain for several minutes, and he uttered many words which were emphatic and condemnatory, and which, though often uttered by men in their haste, are seldom printed in full. He was released from the toils, but he had left a trusty servant behind, a loss to which he could easily reconcile himself, and ten thousand pounds, a loss which was equivalent to much life-blood.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AT WESTBOURNE AND NAPLES.

'To each his sufferings; all are men,
Condemn'd alike to groan,—
The tender for another's pain,
The unfeeling for his own.'—GRAY.

MR. ARGOLL returned to Naples, and put up again at the Hotel Gran Bretagna on the Chiaja; but how he got there from Catania was a vague reminiscence rather than a clear memory. Both partners in the banking firm of Messrs. Palmaro and Vilani had accompanied him to the steamer for Naples. He had not lost his horror of the sea; but he had a greater horror of Sicily for the moment, so he could not be induced to remain an hour longer in

Catania than he could help, and left it on the afternoon of the day that he had an interview with the bankers, and learned how Carlo Nerone had tricked him.

He was very ill on board the steamer. Messrs. Palmaro and Vilani telegraphed at his request to the proprietor of the hotel in Naples at which he had stayed before, and to which he wished to return, asking him to send a person to meet Mr. Argoll on the arrival of the boat. Often, when in the *Hôtel des Étrangers* at Nicata, did he wish himself back in this Neapolitan hotel, and returning to it now seemed almost like returning home. He arrived late in the evening, and went to bed at once. He had not slept so soundly for several weeks, yet he was not wholly refreshed on awaking in the morning.

Being now in perfect safety, he was the better able to review his conduct with calmness. He felt both vexed and angry—vexed that he should have lost so much money, angry that he should have fallen into a trap with his eyes open.

'Oh, that blackguard Carlo!' he kept repeating to himself; he added, 'To think that he should have had the impertinence to hint that I was a brigand of a different kind, but as bad as any of the others! I wish more than ever he would come to London. Yet, perhaps, it is as well that I should not see him again. The rascal may carry as long a knife as Giovanni, and know as well how to use it. If it had not been that these bankers seemed so frightened about the *Maffia*, as they called it, and brigands, I should have stayed to prosecute him. But it's no use lamenting now. Thank heaven, I am out of Sicily safe and sound!'

It is not surprising that Mr. Argoll fell ill again, that he was disinclined to eat his breakfast, that he was at once irritable and languid. He was anxious to see a doctor, and hearing from the hotel porter that Dr. Murray, an English physician, lived not far off, he sent for him. The doctor told him that he chiefly required rest. He had been subjected to a strain, and his nervous system was shattered. He advised him also not to

travel for a week or two, as he was in a very weak state, and said that he could not do better than remain quietly at Naples. Mr. Argoll was really exhausted, and was not in a condition to travel. His worst symptom was general debility and a disinclination to do anything.

Having to rest at Naples and be thankful, he wrote a letter to Mr. Herbert Bandol at Athelstane House, whom he had fixed upon as Mr. Byker's successor, and ordered him to start for Naples as soon as possible after receipt of the letter, and to send a message to Mrs. Argoll at Westbourne before leaving.

This letter gave Mr. Bandol both pain and pleasure. He was sorry to learn that Mr. Byker was dead. None but a brigand or a monster hears of the death of a fellow-creature with whom he has associated on intimate terms without being startled and grieved; and even a brigand regrets the sudden decease of a fellow-brigand who was his father, brother, or son, and a monster like Caliban might be similarly affected if he lost

anyone who had the misfortune of being his relative.

Yet, on the other hand, Mr. Bandol had sat in Mr. Byker's room for several weeks; he had been treated with the deference which was due to one in such a position of trust and authority; he did not wish to return to his subordinate position and duties, therefore he was most anxious to succeed to Mr. Byker's post and salary. On the whole, then, whilst professing regret for Mr. Byker's untimely death, Mr. Bandol could not repress a feeling of satisfaction that his own lines had now fallen in pleasanter places. His fellow-clerks soon made him feel the change. They showed in many small ways that he had risen in their estimation since possessing more authority over them. It never occurred to him that if he, too, were to die suddenly, the clerk who was junior to him would rejoice at the prospect of possible promotion. All men are able to bear up bravely against a stroke of heaven which smites their neighbours and benefits themselves.

The news that something had happened

to Mr. Argoll was circulated in the City. Almost simultaneously with the arrival of the letter from him to Mr. Bandol, a few lines appeared in *The Morning Paper* from the Neapolitan correspondent of that journal. The correspondent wrote :

'I hear that Mr. Argoll, the eminent financier, has returned to Naples from Sicily. He is not in good health. His confidential clerk, who accompanied him to Sicily, has met his death after trying to ascend Mount Etna without a guide. The principal newspaper in Catania, which has just come to hand, states that the late Mr. Byker, for that was the clerk's name, insisted upon making the ascent alone. Pietro, one of the principal guides, who is in the employment of Signor Nerone, the well-known and highly esteemed landlord of the *Hôtel des Étrangers* at Nicata, where Mr. Argoll and Mr. Byker were staying, learnt, when it was too late, that Mr. Byker had undertaken this mad venture, and followed him in the hope of saving his life. Unhappily, the guide, who was highly respected in the neighbourhood, perished in

the effort to rescue Mr. Byker. This has cast a gloom over the locality. It is pleasant to have to record that Signor Nerone has made ample provision for Pietro's widow. Doubtless Mr. Argoll will be equally generous towards Mr. Byker's wife and family. Such is the substance of the statement in the Sicilian paper, which professes to have been written in accordance with information received from Signor Nerone and Mr. Argoll. I may add that Mr. Argoll is now prostrate on a bed of sickness, and may not be able to leave Naples for several weeks. He is attended by an English physician, who states that he is suffering from a nervous affection, partly due to the shock which he must have received at Nicata when he learned that his confidential clerk had lost his life, and partly to the great exertion which he made, notwithstanding the impaired state of his health, to recover the remains of the deceased.'

Probably it is unnecessary to explain how the story appeared in the Sicilian journal, of which the correspondent of *The Morning*

Paper gave the above accurate summary. Carlo Nerone had always been very careful to report to the police authorities of the district the disappearance of any of the English or American visitors at Nicata, and to explain that the missing person had started to ascend Mount Etna, and had not returned. He was always careful to add that a search had been made for the body, but in vain. An entry was made in the police books that such an one had left the *Hôtel des Étrangers* to ascend Mount Etna, and had lost his life, so that when disconsolate survivors made inquiries about the missing man they were always informed that he was dead, and they were further told how he died, and that his remains were irrecoverable.

On the present occasion Carlo had taken greater pains than usual to disseminate his version of the story regarding Mr. Byker. A friend of his, who was a contributor to a newspaper in Catania, and who, like himself, was a member of the *Maffia*, happened to meet him on the evening of the day he bade Mr. Argoll farewell. Carlo told his friend about

the accident, as he called it, to Mr. Byker. His friend wrote a paragraph embodying the information, and it appeared in the next number of the newspaper to which he contributed. There was not much fear of any person in Nicata writing to the editor to point out any inaccuracy in the account, first, because the newspaper was seldom seen there, and secondly, because no one but the parish priest could have read it if a copy reached that small mountain village.

The other London daily morning journals made no reference to Mr. Argoll's adventures and Mr. Byker's death. As the information had been communicated to the public in the columns of *The Morning Paper*, their conductors could not be supposed to have seen it, nor, indeed, was it necessary, as the information had reached the public eye. But as the evening papers had no reason to ignore what had been published in any morning one, paragraphs were written on 'A Catastrophe in Sicily,' which conveyed to the readers much information about Mr. Argoll and his clerk's death, but which did not contain

any clear indication of its source. One of the triumphs of modern journalism is to get early intelligence; another is to furbish intelligence to give it the look of being both early and exclusive. Gipsies used to be famed for their cleverness in dressing up stolen children so as to make them pass for their own. Some newspaper editors display equal skill in appropriating and treating paragraphs of news.

In the City the fate of Mr. Byker attracted no notice, but Mr. Argoll was the object of much sympathy. He was supposed to have suffered greatly; indeed, a story got current about the heroism which he had displayed when his clerk's life was in danger, a story which was as well founded as many other tales of daring adventure and heroic self-sacrifice.

In accordance with his master's orders, Mr. Bandol sent the following message by telegraph to Mrs. Argoll at Westbourne:

'Letter just arrived from Mr. Argoll. I start in the morning for Naples. He desires

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

me to say that he has got safely back to Naples, but that Mr. Byker is dead.'

This was the message which was delivered to Mrs. Argoll as she and the other two ladies were sitting down to dinner in the Cavendish Hotel; its perusal took away their appetites. So little was said about what they most wished to know, that their anxiety was increased rather than allayed by reading it. There was no use sending to Mr. Bandol for further particulars, as he had stated he was to start early in the morning, consequently he would not be at Athelstane House when a telegram arrived there. In the absence of definite details each formed her own theory, and placed her own interpretation upon the words of the message. Mrs. Argoll was convinced that something terrible had happened to her husband, and that the truth had been suppressed. She was disposed to think that Mr. Byker was alive, and had written a letter to Athelstane House, and that Mr. Argoll was really dead, but that the fact was kept back. Miss Solar did not share this opinion, her sympathies being excited by the statement that Mr. Byker had

left his old mother to mourn for him, and she felt for the poor woman. Miss Tacon had no personal opinion, being ready to accept the views of Mrs. Argoll and Miss Solar, and to lament with them both.

The three ladies passed a miserable evening and a restless night. The uncertainty was the hardest to bear. In the midst of her grief Mrs. Argoll could not refrain from thinking and avowing that, if her husband were actually alive and safe at Naples, his duty was to have written directly to her. She considered it an unpardonable offence on his part, having addressed a letter to a clerk before writing to his wife. At one moment she was crying over him as if he were dead, at another she was mentally reproaching him for treating her shamefully if he were alive. She was in the habit of rising early. On the following morning she got up earlier than usual. Miss Solar and Miss Tacon were both in the sitting-room when Mrs. Argoll entered it in tears, and exclaiming: 'I'm sure something dreadful has happened. My poor husband!'

'Do calm yourself, Mrs. Argoll,' exclaimed Miss Solar, in a tone of deep sympathy; 'it is probably not so bad as you suppose. The first post has just come in, and here is a letter for you, in Mr. Argoll's handwriting, and it has the Naples postmark on it.'

Mrs. Argoll dried her eyes and took the letter, saying:

'It is as I thought; my husband thinks more of his business than of me. I——'

She was about to utter something uncomplimentary, though not unwifelike, but she checked herself in time. She then opened the letter, began to read it, looked confused, if not ashamed, and said:

'Isn't breakfast ready? Ring the bell, Ella.'

'Why, aunt,' Ella said, 'we are an hour earlier than usual; that is why the breakfast is not on the table.'

Miss Solar looked out of the window. She had the tact to understand that Mrs. Argoll wanted time before she recurred to the letter, and she said to Miss Tacon:

'Come and look, Ella; I declare there is

that old man with the little dog again; if he wishes to sell it, I think I shall buy it.'

'How can you dream of such a thing, Berta! What will your poodle do if he finds he has a rival in your affections?'

What Miss Solar may have thought of her poodle's feelings in the case suggested cannot be learned, because, when she was about to give her view of the matter, Mrs. Argoll called out:

'Come here, girls. You may like to hear what is in my husband's letter. It is not very long, but I am very glad to get it.'

Being short, it may be given in full:

'"My dear Wife,

'"I suppose you have received all the letters which Byker wrote to you from Nicata when I was down with fever there, so that I need not repeat what you have already heard. I take the first opportunity to write to you from Naples, yet, as you may be at Westbourne, I shall tell Mr. Bandol, to whom I mean to send a letter after this is written, to telegraph to you that he has heard from me, and that I am safe here."'

'Oh, then,' interrupted Miss Solar, 'this letter could not have been delivered here so soon as the one sent to London; how kind it was of Mr. Argoll to think of that, and telling Mr. Bandol to telegraph!'

Mrs. Argoll said nothing. It was not her custom to admit that she had been hasty in speaking ill of her husband. She resumed her reading:

'"I am sorry about Byker having lost his life, but, thank God, I am safe and sound, though I have run great risks. I hope that old Mrs. Byker will not trouble me about her son's death; he was often talking about her, and he spoke as if I were doing him an injury in bringing him away from his mother. However, when he fell down a hole they call the *Inferno*, he had some of my money in his possession which I cannot recover, so I have the greatest reason to complain. I have had to send for a doctor, and fortunately there is an English one here of the name of Murray, whom I rather like. He tells me I must rest for two or three weeks before continuing my journey, and I have sent for Bandol, who

will take Byker's place. You will hear from me soon again. Being weak, I feel it very hard work to write. I hope Berta and Ella are with you, and, with compliments to both,

'"I am, your faithful husband,

'"J. M. ARGOLL."'

'Poor Mrs. Byker! Whatever will she do?' exclaimed Miss Solar, in pitying tones.

Mrs. Argoll added:

'I am sorry for her, poor woman; but I am glad to hear that my husband is not seriously ill.'

'Won't you go and see her?' asked Miss Solar.

'I think not, my dear; I will send a line of condolence to her, and that is enough.'

'Surely not, Mrs. Argoll,' said Miss Solar, with more warmth than was habitual to her. The poor woman must stand in need of something more than a few lines of sympathy. Besides, you have always told me that the poor think far more of personal attention when in affliction than any other form of

help. I think you ought to go yourself to Mrs. Byker.'

'But how can I, Berta? This is my day for visiting Betty Simmons, and, poor body, she will be sadly disappointed if I don't appear. I really cannot go.'

It should be explained, perhaps, that though Mrs. Argoll really sympathized with her poorer and less fortunate fellow-creatures, and was ready to take much trouble about them, and to treat them with great generosity, yet she liked to do these things at her own time, and in her own way. Had Mrs. Byker lived round the corner, Mrs. Argoll would at once have put on her bonnet, and paid her a visit, but she did not see any reason why she should make a journey on her account from Westbourne to Brixton Park. When a man or a woman dies in the street in which one lives, one feels sorry for either, even if the deceased should be an utter stranger; but, if a hundred or a thousand persons die suddenly in Hong Kong, the most soft-hearted person in London does not think of making any other demonstration than to say, 'How very

sad!' Distance alters the view, in addition to lending enchantment to it.

'Well,' said Miss Solar to Mrs. Argoll, 'if you will not accompany me, I must go alone. I am so sorry for poor Mrs. Byker. Perhaps she knows nothing of her son's death, and it will be very sad if she has no one to comfort her after she gets the news.'

'Perhaps,' urged Mrs. Argoll, who was almost inclined to make a sacrifice, and go to the mother of her husband's confidential clerk, 'Mr. Bandol may have written to her; and after all, nothing more can be done to soothe her, except to offer her money, and I am sure my husband will have done that.'

'Judging from Mr. Bandol's telegram, he can have had no time to write to Mrs. Byker; and if he had, he may not have thought of doing so. I will go to town by the first train in the morning, and I shall be able to tell you how the poor woman is.'

Mrs. Argoll made no objection; if she had, it would not have altered Miss Solar's purpose. She started for London early in the morning, and on arriving there, she drove

from the station in a fly direct to Brixton Park. Mrs. Byker was at home. Indeed, she had not left the house since her son's departure. Her rheumatism hindered her from moving farther than from one room to another, and even this was not easy. She had suffered so much of late, that she feared lest she should have to take to her bed for the rest of her life.

When the servant told her that Miss Solar wished to see her, she was then in her bedroom, and she could not understand the message.

'You must have mistook,' she said to Emma, the young maid-of-all-work; 'Mrs. Solar died a long time ago.'

'But it's a young lady, ma'am,' replied Emma; 'she says she must see you, and has come all the way from Westbourne.' Mrs. Byker sent a message to the effect that she would come and see the lady as soon as possible.

It should here be stated that Mrs. Byker had no one staying with her; the friend from the North had been obliged to return

home a fortnight before. But Mrs. Byker was so cheered by the message from Westbourne to the effect that her son was well, that she no longer required anyone to comfort her, and she was patiently awaiting his return. When she entered the small parlour in which Miss Solar was seated, she expressed her regret to have kept her so long, saying:

'I could not come sooner, miss, as my rheumatics are so bad that I can only move slowly at present. I know your name well, but I have never heard tell of anyone of the name since Tom's master died.'

'I am his daughter, Mrs. Byker.'

'Lawks, miss, you don't say so! So you are the beautiful young lady Tom has said was his master's daughter? Don't sit on that hard chair. Please try our sofa. Tom often used to say it was like a feather-bed compared with anything in Athelstane House. Really, it's most kind of you to call on me. I hope you are in good health, and bring me good news.'

Miss Solar was readier to cry than to speak; she wished she had not come. Yet,

having undertaken a painful duty, she was determined to discharge it. With a voice quivering and low, she simply said:

'Mrs. Byker, I am very sorry to have to tell you bad news of your son. A message came about him last night.'

Mrs. Byker listened to every word, and her maternal ear noted that Miss Solar said 'about' and not 'from' her son, and she also inferred from Miss Solar's gentle but constrained manner that something was wrong. She exclaimed, in a tone of suppressed anguish:

'Please, miss, don't keep anything back. Is my boy dead?'

Miss Solar could not restrain her tears at the sight of the old mother's anguish, and it was with a scarcely suppressed sob that she said:

'Mrs. Byker, I would give anything to say that he is alive.'

The poor old woman almost fell forward as she heard these words, and exclaimed, in a half-articulate voice:

'Oh! my boy, my boy!'

Miss Solar rang the bell, which was close at hand, went forward and took Mrs. Byker's hand in hers, and said to the servant who entered the room :

'Help your mistress to the sofa.'

They put her on the sofa with difficulty, where she lay almost unconscious, the tears rolling down her withered cheeks, and the words, 'Oh ! my boy, my boy !' being moaned forth without ceasing.

'Is there a doctor near ?' she asked the servant.

'Yes, miss. Dr. King, who has been about mistress's rheumatics, stays round the corner.'

'Then run and tell him to come at once.'

Dr. King was at home, and came in the course of a few minutes. Miss Solar told him what had occurred. He examined Mrs. Byker, and said :

'We must give her a stimulant, and get her to bed at once. I fear the shock will kill her. It is the hope of seeing her son back soon which has kept her up lately. I was afraid of her slipping through my hands.'

With considerable trouble, the three carried Mrs. Byker to her room and put her to bed.

'I wish, doctor, you would get a nurse; I can wait here and look after Mrs. Byker till you find one. The fly which I got at the station is outside, and you had better take it now.'

'Then I shall go off in the fly, and be back as soon as I can. I quite agree with you that a nurse is required.'

He returned with one at the end of an hour. After his return, Miss Solar asked him to speak with her in the parlour. Handing her card to him, she said:

'Perhaps you ought to know who I am?'

Having looked at the name on the card, he bowed, and she continued:

'I wish you to tell me if I can be of any use to poor Mrs. Byker. If I can, I shall gladly stay here.'

'I think, Miss Solar, that you can do no good at present. On the contrary, the sight of you is bad for her now. What she requires is a sound sleep. I hope, if you can call again to-morrow, you will find her more composed.'

'Very well, then, doctor, I shall come again after breakfast to-morrow. I am very anxious about her, and if you wish for further advice, do not hesitate to say so.'

Dr. King replied : ' I fear the best medical skill can do little for Mrs. Byker ; all that can be accomplished is to keep up her strength with stimulants, and I doubt whether she can recover except by a miracle. But if I see the slightest hope of benefit from a consultation I shall arrange for one to-morrow.'

Miss Solar drove from the house, grieving bitterly. She knew that she had as much money as she required for any purpose, though she had no clear notion of the extent of her actual wealth ; yet here was a case in which she was ready to part with her money freely, and yet doing so would avail little. She resolved to go and spend the night in Palace Gardens, and she returned there, to the annoyance of the servants, whose private arrangements were thereby interfered with. She sent a telegram to Mrs. Argoll, saying that she had decided to remain in town,

and asking her to send her maid to Palace Gardens.

There was little change in Mrs. Byker's condition when Miss Solar called the next day. At her request one of the chief physicians in London was asked to meet Dr. King in consultation, with the result of a verdict being given that nothing could be done by medicine for the patient. She lingered for three days, gradually sinking every hour. Every day Miss Solar spent a few hours in the house, bringing Mrs. Byker fruit and flowers, and doing everything that the most thoughtful sympathy could devise to cheer and comfort the poor old woman. More than once Mrs. Byker recovered from her lethargy, and talked to Miss Solar. It was on the third day, almost at the same time that Miss Solar had told her the sad news, that Mrs. Byker seemed to revive. Then Miss Solar, who was seated reading at the bedside, rose, took her hand, and said:

'Is there anything you would like, Mrs. Byker?' The latter replied slowly, in a distinct tone:

'Nothing, miss; you've been very good to me. May God bless you!' Then she closed her eyes, and said in a scarcely audible whisper: 'I'm going to join my boy,' and passed peacefully away.

Miss Solar had learned from Dr. King that he was a friend of Mr. Byker's, and that when Mr. Byker was going to be married several years previously he had made his will, and appointed the doctor one of his executors, the solicitor who drew the will being the other. Now that the tidings of Mr. Byker's death had reached them, the necessary steps would be taken for authenticating the death and obtaining probate of the will. He assured Miss Solar that there was no lack of money to pay all the funeral and other expenses, and that her offer to be responsible for them was not required. She insisted, however, on attending the funeral, which took place at Brixton Cemetery. Mrs. Byker was laid in the vacant space in the grave which had been bought at the death of her husband, and where her son used to say that he too would repose by the

side of his father and mother. She ordered a plain tombstone to be put over the grave, with the names of the husband and wife, and with the addition of the words, 'This stone is also erected to commemorate the death, in Sicily, of Thomas Byker, the son of the foregoing, who was for many years the confidential and valued clerk in the firm of Messrs. Argoll and Solar.'

An announcement of Mrs. Byker's death appeared in *The Morning Paper*, and there it was stated: 'She did not long survive the sudden death, in Sicily, of her son, Thomas Byker, who for many years was the confidential and valued clerk in the firm of Messrs. Argoll and Solar.'

Mrs. Argoll read this notice, and she remonstrated with Miss Solar, saying:

'I do not think, my dear, that there was any occasion for the announcement in *The Morning Paper*. Mr. Argoll is sure to see it, and he will not like it. I have often heard him say that some people make too much fuss about their clerks.'

Miss Solar's reply was:

'I am sorry you do not like what I have done, but I could not help it. I am sure that if papa were alive he would have done the same thing. I remember him often saying that Byker was a perfect treasure, and he was always most kind to his clerks. Besides, I could not help being sorry for poor Mrs. Byker. He must have been a good son to her.'

Nothing more passed between them on the subject. Mrs. Argoll was right, however, in her supposition that her husband would be displeased. When he read the account in *The Morning Paper* he first said:

'Well, old Mrs. Byker is gone at last; so much the better. I was afraid she would bother me about her son when I got back;' and then he went on to remark in very savage accents, 'I wish I knew who had the impertinence to put this in the paper about Byker. It is utterly preposterous and disgraceful. If anyone in Athelstane House has done it, he will catch it.' Then he ordered Mr. Bandol to write and inquire as to who had drawn up the announcement.

The answer came back that Miss Solar had sent it, with instructions to have it inserted. Mr. Argoll thought it discreet to say no more, and to let the matter drop.

Life at Westbourne went on with its accustomed monotony. The summer season was over, but those who like to spend the autumn at the seaside had arrived, so that the place was not empty, and even if it had been, it would have been more enjoyable than when crowded with cheap trippers, as it generally was in the summer months.

The Reverend Paul Madron had returned from Switzerland, to the great delight of Mrs. Argoll, and the Reverend Basil Tepper had gone for a holiday, greatly to the relief of Miss Solar, and much to the sorrow of many young ladies of whom he was the idol. Miss Tacon did not take so much interest in this important event as her aunt and her friend. She was pleased to go to church; but she had not learnt to appreciate clergymen in private life. As she said:

'I hate being lectured by clergymen; they always seem to think that I deserve a

good talking to, and yet I've done them no harm.'

She had grown irritable of late, and her personal sorrow was rendering her unjust and disagreeable to others. She spent more time alone, and she wrote at greater length in her Diary than she used to do.

Whilst Miss Tacon was at Palace Gardens her time was fully and profitably employed, as her aunt entrusted her with a part of the housekeeping, whereas in the Cavendish Hotel she had simply to amuse herself as she best could. As she would not help her aunt in her charitable duties, she had more leisure than she could turn to rational account. If extracts from her Diary were given, it would be seen that she regarded herself as an ill-used and unhappy young woman; but it would be difficult to justify her complaints, and impossible to read them without thinking the worse of her.

More interesting than Miss Tacon's Diary were Miss Solar's letters to her Aunt Irma; out of the number, the following one may serve to show what the others were like,

and what were her views of the life which she led:

'Dearest Aunt Irma,

'I cannot help feeling anxious to get away from this place, as I feel so unsettled. At Palace Gardens I had my studio to go to when I was bored generally. I have tried sketching to pass the time, but I put it aside after a few days, as I never took up my pencil without thinking of Henry, and I cannot help being sad when I think of him. Several weeks must still elapse before anything definite can be learned about the *Cosmos*.

'I cannot answer all your questions about poor Mr. Byker, as Mr. Argoll has not sent us particulars about his death. He writes that it is an unpleasant story, which he cannot tell now, and that is all we have been able to ascertain. Mrs. Argoll did not approve of my making "so much fuss," as she called it, over the poor mother. It is very strange that, though very kind and charitable, and always visiting the poor

and giving them money—indeed, there is a very old woman, named Betty Simmons, whom she keeps altogether—but I don't believe that Betty Simmons is so old as she says, that is, about a hundred—yet Mrs. Argoll says she never interferes with persons like Mrs. Byker. Her father used to leave his workpeople to shift for themselves in their trouble, and her husband has an objection to interfering in the private affairs of his clerks. You know that my dear father did not think so, as he often spoke about a clerk getting married or being ill; and in either case he always sent a present, or inquired how he was getting on. However, I am not sorry to have done what I could for Mrs. Byker. The doctor who attended her knew her intimately, and said she was an excellent wife and mother, and everybody spoke in the highest terms of her son. When I see Mr. Argoll I shall try and get at the bottom of the mystery of his clerk's death.

'The great event of the day is that the Reverend Basil Tepper has gone for a holiday, and that the Reverend Paul Madron

has come back from one; the first is the curate and the second the vicar, and the people who go to church here are divided into two parties about them. I do not care for either clergyman, and I do not get on well with Mrs. Argoll's visitors, as I am unable to agree with any of them in worshipping their idol. I hope Mr. Argoll will soon be back, and then we shall remove from this wearisome place to Palace Gardens.

'Your loving niece,

'BERTA.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

A TRIP TO NAPLES AND BACK.

'O swallow, swallow! flying, flying South,
Fly to her, and fall upon her gilded eaves
And tell her, tell her what I tell to thee.
O tell her, swallow, thou that knowest each—
That bright and fierce and fickle is the South,
And dark and true and tender is the North.

* * * * * *

O tell her, brief is life, but love is long,
And brief the sun of summer in the North,
And brief the moon of beauty in the South!'

TENNYSON.

MRS. ARGOLL received the following note from Mr. Bandol after he had been a fortnight at Naples:

'MADAM,

'I take the liberty of writing a line to you at the request of Dr. Murray, who is

in daily attendance upon Mr. Argoll, and who says that his friends ought to be told that he is not making satisfactory progress towards recovery, and that he specially wants rousing. He will be all the better for a longer sojourn here; but it is of great importance that he should be amused, and that his mind should be diverted from always dwelling upon business. These are Dr. Murray's words, as exactly as I can reproduce them, and I hope you will pardon me for sending them to you. I am, madam, with great respect,

'Your obedient, humble servant,

'Louis Bandol.'

Mr. Bandol hesitated long before he wrote this note. When Dr. Murray suggested that he should do so, he strongly urged that Dr. Murray should write himself. The latter replied:

'If I were the family physician I should have no scruple about writing; but I have only been called in as there was no other medical man at hand, and I might be

unjustly suspected if I were to interfere. Undoubtedly, if the case were desperate, I should not hesitate; yet there is nothing serious about Mr. Argoll's case, and all he wants to hasten his cure is a little rousing. The presence of his wife or daughter would do him a world of good. If he had a son in his business I would tell the son to keep away from his father at present. He has business on the brain. What he requires, more than medicine, is that he should not dwell so much upon it.'

Before writing himself, Mr. Bandol tried to insinuate to Mr. Argoll that he should allow him to write to his wife. Since Mr. Bandol's arrival, Mr. Argoll had dictated every word of his letters, employing him simply as an amanuensis. His custom for years had been to tell Mr. Byker the substance of what should be said, leaving him to express it in his own words. He was a keen and shrewd judge of men. He had perceived that Mr. Byker was wholly devoted to him, and that he had no ulterior object in view. That his forecast was

correct became clear when Mr. Byker refused the offer to be taken into partnership.

Mr. Bandol was nearly ten years younger than Mr. Byker, and was wholly different in disposition. He knew his work, and he did it honestly and well. He was a faithful and efficient clerk; he took pride in Athelstane House, and was proud of everything connected with it, from the ghost which nobody saw to the wealth of its head by which nobody benefited. He had a good reason for this. He was looked upon with respect by the vast army of clerks in the City of London when it was known that he occupied a high place in Athelstane House. City clerks glory in belonging to a prosperous and respected firm, just as soldiers glory in belonging to a regiment which has seen service and gained renown in every quarter of the globe.

Mr. Bandol's rise had been rapid. He had a great advantage over his fellow-clerks when he became one of their number. His father was a Frenchman from Provence, who had taken refuge in London after the 2nd of

December, 1851; had worked as a silversmith in a leading Bond Street firm, and had married an Englishwoman. He had taught his son to speak, read, and write French; and when the son determined to be a clerk rather than a handicraftsman, and Mr. Solar was asked to get the lad a place in his office (Mr. Bandol senior having been brought into contact with Mr. Solar when the latter had some silver ware made to his order, and the task was put into Mr. Bandol's hands), the lad's acquaintance with French was the reason why he was immediately taken on trial. He gave so much satisfaction that, at the expiry of a month, he was given permanent employment. It was his knowledge of French, and his great use in conducting the correspondence in that language, which led to his rapid promotion, until he first filled the place next to Mr. Byker, and then stepped into the place which Mr. Byker's death rendered vacant.

Yet, though Mr. Argoll valued Mr. Bandol's services, he was loath to give him his confidence. He suspected him, probably

on insufficient grounds, of betraying some of the secrets of the office. As a matter of fact, Mr. Bandol was innocent; but Mr. Argoll would not believe this. Moreover, Mr. Argoll took Mr. Byker's loss the more calmly, not only because he did not care about anyone else losing his money or his life so long as his own was retained or preserved, but because he felt somewhat afraid of Mr. Byker. The latter knew things which Mr. Argoll could not bear to have published for half his fortune; besides, Mr. Byker had grown so necessary that it was difficult, if not impossible, to run counter to him. Indeed, the policy of Athelstane House was laid down and carried out by Mr. Byker as much as by Mr. Argoll. The latter felt that it was vain to stand out against his chief clerk once he had made up his mind as to the propriety of a particular course. It is true that Mr. Byker was generally in the right, and that, when Mr. Argoll rejected or would not listen to his advice, the consequences were disastrous. This was one of the grievances which simmered in Mr. Argoll's bosom, but which

never rose to his lips. He was afraid of saying anything at which Mr. Byker might take offence. In order to prove his independence, he elected now and then to risk money in his own way rather than make it in the way Mr. Byker indicated. In other words, Mr. Byker had become to him a benevolent and well-meaning but most intolerable Old Man of the Sea. Mr. Argoll breathed freely when he heard that Mr. Byker was in the *Inferno*.

As he had resolved never again to become the bondsman of his chief clerk, he did not take Mr. Bandol into his confidence or let him know any more of his private affairs and his personal aims than he was obliged to do. To use his own words, he made Mr. Bandol know his place and keep it. He was confirmed in his course of action by the belief that, if he gave Mr. Bandol the opportunity, he would become far more self-asserting and intolerable than Mr. Byker had ever been. The former was very ambitious, and he had an overweening sense of his capacity. He felt it a degradation to occupy a subor-

dinate post. His aim was to be a partner, and if he obtained any hold on Mr. Argoll he would use it to force his admission into the firm. But, as has been said already, Mr. Argoll was quite as sharp and skilful in reading and counteracting his clerk's game as his clerk was in playing it.

Though afraid to commit himself, Mr. Bandol ventured to write the letter quoted at the outset of this chapter without informing his master of what he had done. He hoped to enlist Mrs. Argoll's sympathy by displaying so much devotion to her husband, and he counted also upon Mr. Argoll's forgiveness if he learned that his action had been dictated by an anxious concern for his welfare.

Yet Mr. Bandol had miscalculated in an important particular. His note made Mrs. Argoll very angry. She resented hearing from him instead of from her husband; she was so ungenerous as to imagine that her husband had told his clerk to write in order to excite and increase her concern.

'My husband is too bad,' she remarked to

Miss Solar and Miss Tacon, when she had finished reading the note. 'He won't even write to me with his own hand, when he could have done so if he liked. I shall take no notice of his clerk's note.'

Mrs. Argoll was, however, mistaken. She had abused a woman's privilege of judging by intuition. She never doubted that she could discern the truth with unerring accuracy.

The simple truth was that Mr. Argoll could not write to her, his illness having taken a form which made it impossible for him to use his pen. As soon as he began to write he seemed to lose the physical power of continuing. The words which were in his mind did not proceed from his pen; his ideas were confused, or else he could not express all that he wished to say. He had told Dr. Murray of these symptoms, and it was their presence which made the doctor counsel Mr. Bandol to write what he did. The doctor felt convinced that the symptoms might pass off if Mr. Argoll's mind were divorced from business, and he was as strongly of opinion that

if he did not soon get rest and relaxation the symptoms would become chronic and more serious.

Miss Solar was far quicker than Mrs. Argoll in sympathizing with those in distress. Her mind was of a finer texture, or rather it was more sensitive to impressions. Besides, Mrs. Argoll disliked being 'put out,' as she phrased it. She delighted in doctoring the sick, and she was not less pleased when those who were well took her medicines, but she objected to doing good, even as an amateur physician, in any other way or at any other time than her own. Hence it was that she would not go and see Mrs. Byker when the painful news of her son's death had to be communicated to the lonely old woman, and now Mrs. Argoll was only too ready to grasp at any excuse for not going to join her husband. Had he been at Westbourne, she would have nursed and over-dosed him with unremitting care and complete self-confidence. Had he arrived at Palace Gardens, she would have gone thither by the first train; but as for changing her habits and the regular

round of her life by making a journey to Naples, that was a step which she was incapable of taking. Besides, she refused to admit that her husband was really ill. She cherished the notion that he was revelling in pleasure at Naples, that he had enjoyed himself so much in Sicily as to be reluctant to return home at once, and that he was lingering on the way at Naples, and alleging his impaired health as a plea for his scandalous conduct. It would be as unjust to her as she was to him to deny that, if she believed her husband was on his death-bed, she would have hastened to him.

Many of the thoughts embodied in the foregoing sentences found expression in her own words. She had made up her mind, and the more Miss Solar tried to reason with her, the more was she fixed in her determination to reject any view save that which chimed with her own. At last Miss Solar said:

'Well, my dear Mrs. Argoll, it is no use discussing the matter any longer! I feel certain that Mr. Bandol would not have written this

note without a good reason, and I am really uneasy about my guardian. I cannot help this, any more than you can help thinking otherwise. If he were my father I know what I should do, and as he is occupying a father's place I shall do the same thing. As soon as I find out when the trains leave I shall start for Naples, and I shall telegraph now that he may expect me any day.'

Without waiting for an answer from Mrs. Argoll, she rang the bell; and whilst the waiter was coming she pencilled these words:

'Start for Naples by first train with maid. Secure rooms.—BERTA.'

And on the waiter appearing she told him to see that the message was sent off at once. Mrs. Argoll thought much but said nothing; nor did she quite know what to say. She would not admit that she was wrong, and she could not deny that Miss Solar was acting in a kindly spirit. When she did speak, it was as follows:

'I must say, Berta, that you are very

impulsive. When I was your age I never did things in so great a hurry, and I don't think that it ever answers to act upon first impressions. If I could stop you, I would; but, as I suppose you will have your own way, do be well advised for once, and take a large box of my pills and a bottle of liniment with you. I am sure you will be the better for taking a pill now and then; and you may give my husband a few pills, which will probably be the kind of change which he really requires.'

Miss Solar simply replied:

'If taking the medicine with me or giving it to anyone else will please you, Mrs. Argoll, I shall do that, but you must not ask me to take any myself. I shall go and see my maid, and give orders about packing.'

As Miss Solar had been accustomed to have her own way from a child, she was self-reliant as well as self-possessed. Had she been carefully nursed and tended by an anxious mother, she would have hesitated to cross the street unattended. The reason why American young girls astonish their

more staid as well as pampered European sisters is that they are both permitted and expected from their earliest years to take care of themselves. Of course, too much independence in a young girl may spoil her quite as greatly as too little freedom; and had not Miss Solar possessed great strength of character, as well as much common-sense, she would have become a semi-masculine young woman, who is quite as offensive a being as a semi-feminine young man. As it was, however, when she thought it her duty to go to Mr. Argoll, she determined to go at once, without troubling herself about any escort or needing any other companion than her maid, Pauline, who was a few years older than she, and who was sent into the world to repel rather than attract the opposite sex by her looks, but who was a faithful and excellent servant, who would go anywhere with her young mistress, and do most cheerfully whatever she was told.

When Miss Solar entered her room, and before her maid had answered her summons, Miss Tacon came in and said:

'Surely, Berta, you cannot be in earnest! Do you really think of going to Naples all by yourself? I am sure I should never dream of doing such a thing.'

'Why not, Ella? What is to prevent my going? Nobody will run away with me; besides, you know, I'm engaged.' As she said this her voice almost failed her, and she added, with a sigh: 'Poor Henry, I wonder what he is doing now!'

This remark went to Miss Tacon's heart, and she burst into tears. 'Oh! if I only knew that Lord John was alive, I should be perfectly happy. I think of him night and day.'

The painful subject which had been casually introduced made both girls very sad, and caused them both to relieve themselves by weeping bitterly. But, on Miss Solar's maid knocking at the door, they recovered their composure instantly, as women, both old and young, have the happy faculty of doing when they please, and they began to talk when the maid entered as if nothing had made either of them shed so many tears. The discussion

as to what clothes to take and what to leave behind soon turned their thoughts to the commonplace and indispensable realities of life.

Everything was got ready with unusual speed, and there seemed no reason why Miss Solar should not start by a very early train and arrive in time to cross the Channel by the morning mail-boat. Indeed, she had made up her mind to do so, despite some suppressed grumbling from her maid about the supply of clean linen being imperfect. So she went to the sitting-room with the intention of saying 'Good-bye,' as well as 'Good-night,' to Mrs. Argoll, not wishing to disturb her in the morning. Mrs. Argoll said to her :

'Well, my dear, as you have resolved to go, there is no use trying to stop you. I am sure my husband will be surprised, and not very well pleased.' She paused for a moment, and then she gave Miss Solar one of those cuts which the most good-natured woman is apt to inflict upon a sister when she is a little out of temper :

'I have no doubt, my dear, that the change will do you good in one respect, as you apparently cannot settle down to anything, and I do not wonder at it, when you must be anxious for news which is a very long time in coming.'

Now it was quite true that Miss Solar was restless and unsettled, and this was not strange. It might be that her sudden resolve to start for Naples was as much due to longing for a change, which might bring relief from the thoughts which haunted her, as to a very strong desire to nurse Mr. Argoll. However, Mrs. Argoll might have spared her the implied reproach and the veiled sneer; but, then, even a kindly matron like Mrs. Argoll is a real woman when, as she would phrase it, she 'is put out.'

Miss Solar was quite capable of parrying an attack, and though much younger and less experienced, she was a match for Mrs. Argoll in making herself disagreeable when she chose. So she took her revenge, not by retorting that perhaps Mrs. Argoll would go to see her husband if her presence would put

him in a better humour—she could not say anything so cruel—but she replied :

'Thank you, Mrs. Argoll, for your kind interest in me. I am a little unsettled and troublesome, and it is very amiable in you, bearing with me as you do.'

Mrs. Argoll was at a loss for a reply which should not display her vexation, when the happy thought struck her to ask Miss Solar :

'But what about money, Berta ; have you enough for your journey ?'

'Dear me ! I quite forgot that.' Then she took out her purse, and found that it contained a few sovereigns only ; Mrs. Argoll had not much more, and Miss Tacon had nothing.

On ringing the bell, and asking the waiter to inquire if a cheque for a hundred pounds could be cashed, the answer was :

'The clerk is very sorry, miss, but he has not enough in the till, as all the notes and gold have been sent to the bank ; but he will be happy to let you have the money when the bank opens in the morning.'

'How provoking !' said Miss Solar.

'How provoking !' echoed Mrs. Argoll, in a

tone which implied the reverse of the words themselves. So the journey had to be postponed, and the ladies spent another quiet evening in each other's company.

In nothing have the rich a more marked advantage over the poor than in the greater ease and facility with which they can move from place to place. Those who have enough to live upon, but nothing for superfluous enjoyment, have to be packed in railway carriages and steamboats so closely that travelling, especially by night, becomes a good preparation for purgatory. The very rich and the eccentric, like the late Duke of Brunswick, may escape sea-sickness by crossing the Channel in a balloon. Those for whom a voyage in a balloon would have no attraction, but who wish to enjoy the maximum of comfort, engage whole compartments or saloon carriages for themselves on the railway and private cabins on board ship. Miss Solar, though not given to spend her money out of ostentation, was wise enough now to expend it on her own comfort, and thus the journey of herself and her maid to Naples was neither

fatiguing nor eventful. There was no one to annoy her on board the steamer, because she occupied a private cabin; in the train she engaged and paid for a compartment, so that no one could annoy her there. Indeed, her journey, which Mrs. Argoll deemed an adventurous one, and which Miss Tacon thought equivalent to rushing into the jaws of destruction, was not more trying in itself, though rather more fatiguing, than that between Westbourne and London.

Having nothing else to do the evening before her departure from Westbourne, she had carefully examined the several routes from London to Naples, and she determined to proceed thither by way of Calais, Basle, Milan, and Rome. She spent three nights on the road, and a week after the time of her resolving to go to Mr. Argoll she was shaking hands with him in the Gran Bretagna Hotel at Naples. His first words were:

'This is very good of you, Berta; but I wish you had not given yourself so much trouble. I suppose my wife could not leave her charitable occupations, and I am not sorry

that she has not troubled herself on my account. Now that you have come, I hope that I shall soon get all right. I am really glad to have some one to talk to, as I do not wish to converse with Bandol except on business.'

Miss Solar was shocked when she first saw him. He looked many years older than when they parted in London.

'Don't speak of trouble, Mr. Argoll,' she replied; 'you have been very kind to me, and I am only too happy to be of any use to you. I don't think Mrs. Argoll is quite well, or she would have come too.'

This last remark was well meant, but it did not produce a favourable impression. Mr. Argoll was in the habit of regarding his wife as the incarnation of selfishness, and he would have been disappointed if she had made a sacrifice on his account.

Though really anxious to do her best to make Mr. Argoll comfortable, Miss Solar was also inspired with a desire to visit Naples. Indeed, her desire to see it was high strung. The weather was not very fine

as she and her maid journeyed from Calais to Basle; when crossing the Alps they found it bitterly cold; when crossing the plains of Lombardy rain fell in torrents; it was fine and warm in Rome, and Miss Solar expected that the weather in Naples would be finer still.

She had a front room in the hotel which looked on the public garden, and from which there was an exquisite view over the sea, with Mount Vesuvius as the striking and most conspicuous object in the background. Miss Solar was assured that the view was lovely; when she looked out in the morning neither blue sea nor burning mountain was visible; the air was thick, the sky was leaden. The murky atmosphere of London might be more gloomy, but it could not be more depressing. What is called a Scotch mist shrouded the prospect. Those persons who visit Naples for the first time never expect to find a Scotch mist there; but one of the advantages of foreign travel is that one learns how much one country resembles another when the atmosphere is thick and the

rain falls. If the air had been chilly and rain falling in torrents in the Garden of Eden on the day Adam and Eve were expelled from it, and if the sun had shone brightly and the air had been balmy outside, they would not have thought their lot so hard at the moment. The weather is an important factor in pleasure. When it is fine and enjoyable, a human being can almost dispense with the blessings of a well-filled purse, a sound body, and a good conscience.

For a week Miss Solar scarcely left the hotel. The porter, the proprietor, and everyone she spoke to had never known such weather before; indeed, it was no part of their function to recall unpleasant experiences; they added that it could not be fine always, which did not console Miss Solar for its not being fine then. However, when the change did come she was enchanted. She had never before beheld such a prospect as that which met her eye from the window of her room.

'This is beautiful!' she exclaimed; 'I can now understand the rapturous strain in which

Naples is spoken of. This is something like a terrestrial paradise!'

Whilst weather-bound in the hotel, both Miss Solar and Mr. Argoll had the more leisure for conversation, and each had much to ask and to tell. Till she came and talked over all that had happened since they met, Mr. Argoll had not heard of the reported loss of the *Cosmos*. He was greatly shocked and grieved, not so much because the vessel might have foundered with all on board, but because the lives of Lord John Cardonald, his brother, and the mining expert had not been insured.

'I suggested that this should be done,' he said to her, 'but my friends did not think it necessary. I knew I was right, and I am vexed not to have insisted upon it. If their lives had been insured, and nothing had been heard of them again, we should each have got our money back. As it is, we may have lost everything.'

His loss would have amounted to one hundred pounds—a sum which should not appear serious to a man whose income

exceeded fifty thousand a year; but to him, as to all very rich men, the loss of one hundred pounds appeared a terrible calamity.

'But, Mr. Argoll,' urged Miss Solar, 'think of your poor brother,' and as she said this the tears started to her eyes, while she had to exercise all her self-command lest she should break down and make a scene, which, as she knew, Mr. Argoll hated beyond measure.

'Yes, Berta, it will be sad if they should be drowned; but then we must all die some day, and it is no use fighting against fate.'

He was correct in his sentiment, but inexcusable in his manner of expressing it: his tone conveyed what he really felt; indeed, he would not have regretted to hear of his brother's death. Like other men who bear with fortitude or indifference the deaths of their friends or relatives, Mr. Argoll was in abject terror of dying. He admitted, of course, that he was mortal; yet he could not realize Athelstane House existing without him, nor could he understand how he should ever cease to be the ruling power there.

The saying of the late M. Thiers, when upwards of eighty, might have been uttered with equal truth by Mr. Argoll, if he had been capable of saying anything which deserved to be remembered or quoted: 'We know that we must all die, but we don't believe it.'

The harsh, cynical tone in which he regarded the possibility of all the members of the expedition having gone to the bottom of the sea made Miss Solar shudder. But she had not then seen much of Mr. Argoll except when he was on his best behaviour, and she would have been pained to learn that a man whom she had been wont to regard with respect was really a cold-blooded cynic.

In the course of their talk, she expressed a desire to hear the facts about his visit to Sicily; but he evaded her questions. She had preserved a copy of *The Morning Paper* containing the passage which has been quoted, and she said to him:

'Do tell me, Mr. Argoll, how much of this is true. I should so like to know. I wish I could learn the facts about poor Mr.

Byker, whose mother seemed such a dear old body.'

'Well, Berta,' he replied, 'it is difficult to tell you how much is true and how much is false in any newspaper report. The whole subject is a painful one, which I do not care to discuss. But the accounts in the papers are more puzzling to me than they can be to you.'

Taking a copy of the *Financial Observer* out of a bundle of documents on the table, he said to her:

'Read this, and tell me what you think of it.'

It should be explained, perhaps, that two classes of newspapers have sprung into existence of late years; the one class contains more or less accurate accounts of actual occurrences, the other detailed accounts of what never occurred. The latter class—of which successful specimens are to be found in London, Paris, and New York, amongst other places in Europe and America—has many attractions for the public. A news manufactory is more easily conducted than a

newspaper, and it pays far better. Neither the cunning fabricators nor the skilful vendors of false or adulterated news profess any aversion to truth in the abstract; but they must live, and if the concoction and dissemination of graphic falsehoods should enable them to live in luxury, why should others censure them? To a philosopher they have their place and function in the scheme of creation. They represent the survival of the fittest, provided the least worthy are those whose tenacity of life is the greatest, and whose staying power lasts the longest.

After reading the account, Miss Solar said:

'Surely, Mr. Argoll, you deserve great praise for acting with such bravery and generosity.'

He was there described as lavishing money to save Mr. Byker, and rising from a sick bed for the purpose, and also as offering a reward of many thousands of pounds to anyone who should recover his body. Indeed, he was depicted as being at once a modern Bayard and a millionaire. He had no objection to the flattery, but he was in dread

lest the facts should be disclosed, and his conduct set forth in its true colours. So he turned the subject by saying:

'Perhaps, Berta, when we are at Palace Gardens again, I may tell you the whole story; only do not press me now, as it is one upon which I cannot dwell without feeling wretched.'

She did not require a second appeal to prevent her recurring to the subject. She gave him credit for mourning the untimely death of Mr. Byker so keenly that she did not like to revive or intensify a painful memory. What still weighed upon Mr. Argoll's mind was, first, that Mr. Byker should have taken two hundred pounds with him when he was engulfed in the *Inferno*, and second, that Carlo Nerone should have tricked him into paying ten thousand pounds by way of ransom.

Mr. Argoll turned Miss Solar's presence to profitable account. His bodily weakness was so great that he still used a pen with difficulty. He wished to write confidential letters to Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc,

and others, and he did not desire that Mr. Bandol should learn what he said to them. Accordingly, he employed her as his amanuensis; she gladly wrote at his dictation, and what he said did not make the slightest impression on her mind.

As everything in Naples was new to Miss Solar, and as she had a greater desire to see the sights than Mr. Argoll, he had to exert himself to gratify her, and the exercise did him good. They drove from place to place. Those who are acquainted with the points of interest in Naples do not require to be told where they went; those who are not will find enough in the guide-book of Murray or Baedecker to enable them to form a fair notion of what they saw. But what may be recorded here is not to be learned in any guide-book, and that is, that Miss Solar was driven almost frantic with the noise. Mr. Argoll was so much accustomed to the roar of the London streets that he was not impressed or annoyed by the din of those in Naples—a noise which seemed to increase in intensity towards midnight,

when the streets in the heart of London are slowly but perceptibly growing silent. The noise in Naples begins at an earlier hour and continues to a later one than in any other Italian city save Genoa; and in Genoa the pandemonium of human voices is not perceptible at a moderate distance from the port.

Mr. Argoll revisited Pompeii, and he liked the second visit better than the first, when Mr. Byker accompanied him. Mr. Byker had to be told all about Pompeii. Miss Solar had read *The Last Days of Pompeii.* She was overjoyed to find that there was one book she liked with which her guardian was familiar. She compared notes with him, plied him with questions, and started topics about which he was ashamed to confess his ignorance. She displayed a curiosity and enthusiasm far greater than his own, and it deprived him of the supreme pleasure of teaching her something—a pleasure which he might have enjoyed if she had not read the novel and remembered its contents even better than he did.

Mr. Argoll stood in a slight dread of his ward. She had read books by the hundred of which he did not know the names; she could speak modern languages fluently of which he could not pronounce a word correctly; she was, in short, far too cultured for his taste. He preferred young ladies like Miss Tacon, who had no superfluous knowledge. Nor did Miss Solar's interest in the Aquarium find a response in his breast. She went into raptures over the sights there presented. He had visited the Aquarium at Brighton, and thought it a gloomy and dull place; he admitted that the Neapolitan one was much brighter, larger, and finer; yet what was the use, he said, of having fish swimming about in a tank?

'Surely, Berta, fish look far better in a fishmonger's shop. Besides, they are of some use there: they can be bought and eaten.'

'Oh, how can you say so, Mr. Argoll? I cannot bear the sight of dead fish, unless they are cooked, and then they do not look like fish. The only disappointment Lord Beaconsfield's novels ever gave me was with refer-

ence to fish exposed in a shop. I suppose you've read "Lothair"?'

Mr. Argoll had not; but, after professing a full acquaintance with a novel by Lord Lytton, he was ashamed to avow to his ward that he had not read one of Lord Beaconsfield's. Instead of saying 'No,' he replied:

'He has written so many that I cannot remember them all, and I've quite forgotten the one you name. But what about it?'

'Why, I was so struck with what he said about a fishmonger's shop in Bond Street at what he called the "matin hour," that I once persuaded aunt Irma to get up and go with me before breakfast to see the sight. I have not a good memory for passages of the kind; but this one I have never forgotten. It runs something in this style: "The palm, perhaps, would be given to the fishmongers, with their exuberant exhibitions, grouped with skill, startling often with strange forms, dazzling with prismatic tints, and breathing the invigorating redolence of the sea." Well, the sight and the smell were not at all agreeable. When I got home and found there

was sole for breakfast, I could not eat a morsel. Now, to see fish in the Aquarium is quite different; they are really lovely. There is nothing I should like so much to have as an aquarium on a large scale.'

'Everyone to his taste, Berta. I like fish boiled or fried in a dish on a table far better than swimming about in an aquarium.'

So the days passed agreeably away. In the evening they played at draughts, which he knew, and at dominoes, which she taught him. The weather continued heavenly. Mr. Argoll's strength and spirits slowly returned, and three weeks after Miss Solar's arrival he felt quite a different man. Dr. Murray informed him that he had made sufficient progress to be able to return home by slow stages.

Once in motion, Mr. Argoll felt disinclined to halt. Yet, at Miss Solar's urgent request, he took a rest at Rome. She wished him to continue his journey to Paris by way of the Riviera, as she desired to behold the coast from Genoa to Nice, of which she had read glowing accounts; and she had a great desire to stop at

Monte Carlo, and see, first, whether the place were as wicked as it was painted, and, second, what a wicked place looked like. But this foolish or morbid curiosity, as some persons might term it, was not gratified. Mr. Argoll had a greater dislike than when he left England to journeying along the Riviera. So the pair went to Paris by way of Turin, and they took a rest in the city of light and the capital of civilization before returning to the capital of England.

In Paris, as in Naples, Mr. Argoll had to spend much time going sight-seeing to please his ward. He did not object to driving about; but he considered it a frightful infliction to spend hours in museums and picture-galleries. Miss Solar was enraptured when he was groaning in spirit. Yet, though this enforced sight-seeing did not conduce to his pleasure and did not add anything to the knowledge which he cared to retain, he was physically benefited by it. His mind got farther out of a groove; his thoughts were diverted more completely from business. Though Mr. Argoll did not enjoy the ten

days which he spent in Paris, he felt all the better for this visit. What he bore with least repining was going to the theatre and the opera. He did not understand French, and he did not like operas; but he could sleep soundly throughout the performance, and thus the evening passed away at the theatre or the opera to his comparative satisfaction.

Of course he saw and had much serious talk with Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc. They were greatly concerned about an Egyptian loan, in which they held a large interest. They had heard that Mr. Palestine, an eminent English statesman, was about to visit Egypt with a view to make arrangements for the bondholders being paid what they considered their due, and they pressed upon Mr. Argoll the importance of getting Mr. Palestine to give close attention to the class of bonds of which they and their friends were large holders. In order to stimulate Mr. Argoll's ardour, they entered into an agreement according to which one hundred thousand pounds would be received by him in the event of this Egyptian loan

being ranked amongst those which were to be included in the settlement which was in contemplation between the Government of Egypt and its creditors. It was most gratifying for them to learn, before many months elapsed, that Mr. Argoll's personal representation had proved effectual: it was not less gratifying to him when the promised hundred thousand pounds were placed to his credit. Moreover, he obtained high praise as a benefactor of the bondholders.

Mr. Argoll and his ward dined at the houses of both partners in the firm of Blumenheim and Caradoc, and both were smitten with her. Each regretted that he was not a bachelor, as Miss Solar's person and purse attracted him. Their wives did not like her. As they could not speak English, they could not talk to Mr. Argoll, and they had to converse exclusively with Miss Solar, and their supersensitive and patriotic ears were tortured by her German accent. Indeed, as she had been taught French by a German, and had enjoyed few opportunities of speaking or

hearing it spoken in France, it is not strange that her accent should be peculiar. Her beauty and reputed wealth were no recommendation in the eyes of these ladies when they learned that she was engaged to be married. Each might have forgiven her German accent if she could have made her the wife of one of her sons.

Before starting for London, Mr. Argoll wrote to his wife, asking her to go back to Palace Gardens, and set everything in order for him. His command was grudgingly obeyed. His carriage was in waiting for him at Charing Cross station. As he drove through the London streets, he felt livelier than he had done for months, and the sight was a pleasure to his eyes. He said with perfect sincerity to Miss Solar, as they drove through the gate leading to his house:

'Well, Berta, I now feel there's no place like home after all.'

She was more indifferent than he; indeed, she would gladly have prolonged her stay abroad. Yet she, too, had her spirits raised to fever height when, on the hall-door being

opened, Miss Tacon rushed forward to meet her in a state of uncontrollable excitement, exclaiming :

'Oh, Berta, there's a letter just come for you; and I think it's from South America!'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BACK IN THE CITY.

'Ye're a young gentleman,' Bailie Nicol Jarvie replied, 'and an Englishman, and a' this may be very fine to you; but for me, wha am a plain man, and ken something o' the different values of land, I wadna gie the finest sight we hae seen in the Hielands for the first keek o' the Gorbals o' Glasgow; and if I were ance there, it suldna be every fule's errand, begging your pardon, Mr. Francis, that suld take me out o' sight o' Saint Mungo's steeple again!'—Sir Walter Scott's *Rob Roy.*

THOUGH Mrs. Argoll was glad to see her husband again, her manner conveyed an opposite impression. Her greeting was distant and constrained, implying that she did not mean to commit herself by any excess of enthusiasm.

It has been said already that Mrs. Argoll

was a good-natured and kindly-disposed woman ; it should now be added that she was not uniformly good-natured, and that her best qualities were often in abeyance. So long as it suited herself and her plans, no one would do more to serve another. She was charitable, but at her own time and in her own way. When suddenly called upon to subscribe to a fund for the relief of distress, she was quite as capable as her husband of giving an emphatic refusal. Yet she was not so consistent as he in declining to help or relieve a neighbour. After refusing to give money when asked, she would forward a contribution to some other charity for which her support had not been solicited. Much of her goodness, then, was manifested by fits and starts. The more unpleasant side of her nature was shown when her husband arrived. One of the first phrases which she addressed to him was :

'I hope, J. M., you have had a lesson, and will take my advice the next time you think of leaving home. Had you come with me to Westbourne, we should both have been

happier. I am not surprised to see you looking so ill.'

'Well, my dear, I am very glad to be back in my own house and to see you; so do not spoil my pleasure by fault-finding. You will lose your trouble if you try and frighten me about my health. I never felt better in my life.'

As the gong sounded for dinner, an outbreak of hostilities between the husband and wife was postponed.

Mrs. Argoll thought herself aggrieved at having had to leave Westbourne at a very short notice. She had made many arrangements and appointments which would have occupied her another week, and she entertained an ill-founded notion that her husband had returned a week sooner than was necessary in order to annoy her. Thus she was in no mood to give him a cordial reception. She had the two-fold grievance that her husband had stayed away too long and returned too soon. A double grievance gives a woman a terrible power of annoyance, as she will never admit that both parts can be adequately redressed

and atoned for. If the one half be disposed of, the other remains to represent and be treated as the whole.

Everyone was stiff and constrained at the dinner-table except Miss Solar, who, though she spoke little, seemed in capital spirits. Miss Tacon was manifestly anxious. She had not managed to have a talk with her friend before dinner, the latter having said :

'Wait till afterwards, Ella ; I have so much to say that I don't wish to begin now. I shall go to my room as soon as dinner is over, and you may come to me there.'

This did not satisfy Miss Tacon's anxiety to learn what was in the letter from South America ; on the contrary, it kept her in a state of half-suppressed uneasiness.

When the dessert was on the table, and the business of eating did not occupy the whole thoughts of the party, Mrs. Argoll said to Miss Solar :

'Is it true, Berta, that you have received a letter from South America ? Ella said she was sure you had, but I forgot to ask you sooner, as I could not think of anything but

the pleasure of having my husband back again.'

Her husband heard what she said, but he refrained from giving utterance to the remark which rose to his lips: 'I did not fancy, my dear, that you were delighted to see me back again.'

Addressing Miss Solar, he said:

'So you've had a letter, Berta. I hope Lord John is all right.'

Berta did not care whether Lord John were all right or the reverse, and she noticed that her guardian carefully and, as she thought, spitefully avoided even acknowledging the existence of his brother. This was characteristic of him, no doubt; but she did not like it. Indeed, she was gradually arriving at the conclusion that Mr. Argoll was alike heartless and selfish; yet she instinctively shrank from admitting this to herself. She liked to have a good opinion of the people she lived with; she had once regarded Mr. Argoll as a model of all the minor virtues, and she naturally dreaded being disenchanted and compelled to see him in another and less

estimable light. It was to humour him, rather than to give expression to feelings which where stirring in her breast, she refrained from mentioning that Henry had written to her, or that he was well and happy, so she quietly replied :

'I am glad to say that Lord John Cardonald has been enjoying himself.'

'So he is not drowned after all!' observed Mr. Argoll, and added, 'Thank God for that! I am glad now that we did not insure his life and those of the others, because if we had, the money would have been thrown away; besides, the premium would have been no joke. I hope he will have the sense to send his report by post, so that if anything should happen to him on his return journey we shall be no losers.'

'But what do you mean about insuring Lord John's life?' asked Mrs. Argoll, to whom all such matters were mysteries. 'That wouldn't keep him alive, surely!'

'No, my dear; but if he died, we should get back enough to save us from a loss.'

'I don't understand these things, J. M.,'

was Mrs. Argoll's truthful comment; she added, 'I suppose you know best what to do; as it is, I am very glad to hear he is alive and well, even though his life is not insured.'

Miss Tacon, who said nothing, was in the seventh heaven of delight. It was enough for her to hear that the hero of her dreams was well instead of having become, as she had feared, food for the fishes.

The party separated without meeting again in the drawing-room. Mr. Argoll went to his study to look over a pile of papers which had accumulated during his absence, and he was so absorbed in the task as to sit there after twelve o'clock had struck, and to forget his own rule about turning off the gas at that hour. Mrs. Argoll went to bed, there to meditate upon her wrongs. She was convinced that few women were so ill used as she, and she was not sorry to think that she was a victim. Women who are endowed with a considerable measure of silliness find nearly as much gratification in fancying that they are misunderstood and badly treated

as sensible women find pleasure in making the best of life.

When Miss Solar told Miss Tacon that she would read to her Mr. Henry Argoll's letter, she was inexpressibly grateful. As the letter is not long, and does not contain any love secrets, it may be given in full without filling too much space and without any breach of confidence. The letter was posted at Punta Arenas, within the Straits of Magellan, immediately after the arrival of the expedition :

'DEAREST BERTA,

'I have but a few minutes for writing. There is just a chance of a letter catching the Liverpool steamer which has stopped and sent a boat ashore. There is a post-office here. What makes me the more anxious to write is that I have seen a copy of the *Buenos Ayres Standard*, which one of the sailors has bought on shore, and in which there is a telegram about the *Cosmos* having been run down and sunk at sea. I suppose that vessel was one of the "ocean

tramps" which go from place to place to pick up freight, but it is not the *Cosmos* of the line from Liverpool to Valparaiso, belonging to Messrs. Shute and Stanwick, in which we sailed. We were all well, and looking forward to much harder work than eating four or five meals daily on board ship, which was our principal occupation during the voyage here.

'Lord John is in splendid health; he has been in his element, and enjoyed the respect paid to him by everyone on board, from the captain downwards, as being both a lord and a captain in the navy. I like him better than I did. He is quite another fellow on a ship than on land, and I may say we have become great friends. He often tells me that I am a lucky dog, and I agree with him. When you see him again, you will remark an extraordinary change in his appearance. I must not say what it is; but you will soon find it out. He has promised to call at Palace Gardens immediately after his return, as I have told him that you will now be very glad to meet him again. The man says that I must give him this note, otherwise it can't

go in the bag, which is kept open for it, so I can only add that I hope you are not forgetting your own

'HENRY.'

'Oh, Berta! what can be the matter with Lord John?' was Miss Tacon's anxious remark, after the letter had been read to her.

Miss Solar did not care, so she replied, with an indifference which was not assumed:

'I really cannot say, Ella. I should not think it can be of much consequence.'

Miss Tacon was on the point of bursting into tears, when it suddenly occurred to her that there might be a lady in the case, and she grew still more uneasy. 'Surely Lord John was not engaged to be married,' yet she thought that it was quite possible; indeed, the remark about his calling at Palace Gardens seemed to imply that Mr. Henry Argoll had no longer any excuse for jealousy, and it seemed to her that his engagement or marriage must be the explanation of the mysterious statement.

'I wish I had never heard your letter!' was her piteous exclamation.

She was more wretched than she had been when fearing lest her paragon amongst men had been drowned. She considered it cruel in Mr. Henry Argoll making such a mystery about a matter which might be life or death to her. She had always regarded him as a disagreeable man; she was now of opinion that he was a very wicked one.

Till Mr. Argoll went to Athelstane House the next day, he had not realized how dark, dingy, and uncomfortable it was. There was not much difference between it and other offices in which City magnates spend several hours daily and amass large fortunes. Since seeing the comfortable and well-lit office of Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc, he was struck with the contrast. Had he been absent for a fortnight only, he might not have been so much impressed as he now was after an absence of three months. Having grown accustomed to the bright sunshine and clear sky of Italy, he felt it a great

hardship to labour in the dirty and comfortless room in his office, where the sun's rays never entered, even on the rare occasions that they were visible outside.

Quite as annoying as the squalid look of the place, where he had spent so many years without remarking anything objectionable, was the absence of Mr. Byker. He now missed him as he never thought he should have done. He had not realized how serviceable he was till he lost him. Mr. Bandol did the work required of him quite as well as Mr. Byker; he stood on far greater ceremony, never entering the room without permission, and never hazarding an opinion. Whilst Mr. Byker lived, Mr. Argoll often wished for such a state of things, and felt annoyed that his confidential clerk should be far too confidential. It is true that he could keep business secrets from Mr. Bandol which he would not have ventured to have kept from Mr. Byker; on the other hand, this entailed more labour upon himself, and he found the labour irksome. What specially irritated him was

that he could not help putting the question to himself at every moment:

'What would Byker have thought of this?' or, 'How would Byker have acted in such a case?'

The conviction was brought home to him that Mr. Byker was really his right-hand man, if not the leading person in the office. By trusting him so long and so much, he had lost confidence in his own judgment, and there were very many important questions about which he found he was ignorant. Now, indeed, he would have given a large sum of money to restore Mr. Byker to life, and now, for the first time, he most sincerely deplored his death.

Mr. Argoll's whole position in the City had undergone a change. He felt himself a more important personage, because he was treated with increased deference and respect. This was partly due to his action in handing over twenty thousand pounds to the liquidator of *The Riviera Sanitation Company.* The sum itself sufficed to pay the company's debts and to give all those concerned in the liquida-

tion larger pickings than would otherwise have fallen to their lot. These persons and their friends were loud in Mr. Argoll's praise. Though the shareholders had lost so much they were ready to affirm that he had acted most handsomely, and with a liberality which did him honour. It is so rare for a financier ever to disgorge, unless compelled by law, that Mr. Argoll's voluntary act was regarded as a piece of magnanimity. People never reflected that, if he had not done so, he might have had to pay more or to suffer severely at the hands of justice; nor could they know that, after making such a large payment, he remained a very large gainer. As it was, Mr. Argoll profited by the course he had taken, and he rose far higher than before in the estimation of fellow-citizens, those who hold that honesty is the true policy when it brings grist to the mill.

Mr. Argoll was enabled to do his City friends a service which endeared him to them. He had just reason for thinking that his representations would have great effect upon Mr. Palestine; and, indeed, he was confident

that the distinguished English statesman would take good care that the holders of Egyptian bonds received their full pound of flesh from Egypt. In view of this contingency, Mr. Argoll saw his way to make much money. At that time, all classes of the Egyptian loan were very low in price, and the price of the unrecognised class, in which Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc were interested, was the lowest, proportionately, of them all. If the arrangement were effected in the manner Mr. Argoll desired and hoped, each class would rise in value, and the last one would have the greatest rise of any. He acted upon this calculation, and he gave his friends and acquaintances a significant hint to do likewise.

Those who were not the friends of Mr. Argoll—and, like other good men, he had a few enemies—thought it their duty to run counter to him, and they were selling, or in City phrase 'bearing,' Egyptians, whilst he and his friends were buying, or 'bulling,' them. Mr. Argoll proved to be in the right. The scheme finally agreed to was that which

suited his purpose and views, and he became a much richer man. Indeed, the million which he had regarded as the one object of his life and ambition to possess was nearly multiplied by two as the result of his speculations in Egyptians. His friends were enriched and enthusiastic also. His enemies lost their money and their tempers; what was better, as far as he was concerned, they gave up the struggle with him. The man who is recognised as too strong for his neighbours becomes a deity in the City. He is worshipped as blindly in the days of his recognised power as he was opposed in the days when he struggled for the mastery. In the world of finance, might, in the concrete form of a long purse, can always prevail. Providence is on the side of the millionaires.

There was a danger, indeed, of Mr. Argoll becoming a person as legendary as Jack the Giant Killer. He obtained credit for feats which he had never performed. He was regarded with the esteem and awe which in the country of savages are displayed towards

medicine-men. The true story of his adventures in Sicily was not known ; but an imaginary one was generally accepted as the truth.

As Mr. Argoll was in the habit of saying, 'Poor Byker! I miss him sadly'—being moved to do this by the greater trouble he had to take now that Mr. Byker was no longer within call—it was supposed that a generous sympathy for his faithful clerk had urged him to perform heroic deeds in a vain effort to save his clerk's life. Those who were well informed, and anxious to ingratiate themselves with Mr. Argoll, used to speak in his presence of the noble way in which he had striven to rescue Mr. Byker from death. It was cited, in proof of Mr. Argoll's kindly feelings and tender nature, that when Mr. Byker died he caused a notice to be inserted in *The Morning Paper* which was most complimentary to his deceased clerk. Mr. Argoll neither contradicted nor confirmed these statements. All he used to say was :

'These are unpleasant matters, about which I don't like to talk.'

His hearers took this to be a confirmation of their belief that his mind was highly sensitive, and that he shrank from dwelling upon anything which was painful, and they gave him credit for extreme delicacy of sentiment. Even Mr. Argoll's enemies were obliged to admit, as they listened to these fables :

'Well, that fellow is better at bottom than we should have supposed. Though we don't think he always acts on the square here, he seems to have shown himself a regular trump in Sicily.' They were almost disposed to add, 'We are all proud of him.'

It was an abiding satisfaction to Mr. Argoll that nothing appeared to be known about his having had to pay ten thousand pounds for ransom. He felt certain that his prestige would diminish if the story of his dealings with Carlo Nerone were made public. He would then appear in the character of a dupe, and a financier who has to admit that he has been the victim of another is as much discredited and disgraced as a general who loses a battle owing to his incompetence. If the ease with which Carlo imposed upon Mr.

Argoll had been understood, he would be regarded as a fair object for plunder. As it was, he received credit for preternatural sharpness, and none summoned up courage to grapple with him. Burglars do not try to break into a house which they know to be well guarded. The City man who has a reputation for great astuteness is spared from the assaults of the swindler.

It was not quite easy for Mr. Argoll to give a plausible explanation why he had returned without acquiring a Sicilian estate and the title of Count. He had boasted, rather foolishly, of obtaining both. He had no trouble with the Duke of Fontainebleau, to whom he wrote, saying that after visiting Sicily he had changed his mind as to becoming a landowner there. He added that he had been very ill during his visit, and the Duke naturally concluded that the attack of illness had prejudiced him against the island, and he replied with an expression of regret, and a hope that Mr. Argoll was restored again to his usual robust health.

And here it may be noted that amongst

the most remarkable changes in Mr. Argoll, none was more extraordinary than the improvement in his physical condition. Having recovered from the fever and the shock in Sicily, he seemed transformed in other respects. This was due to following Dr. Murray's advice. That physician soon perceived that Mr. Argoll was a victim to quack medicines, and he advised him to try and break himself of the bad habit of drugging himself. As he could not get some of his favourite medicines at Naples, he had to do what Dr. Murray suggested. By ceasing to take medicine when he did not require any he regained much of his lost health. Open air and sunshine undid a large portion of the harm which had been wrought by close confinement in gloomy, unwholesome Athel stane House. Indeed, he had almost forgotten that it had been his custom to dose himself night and morning, when his wife sharply said to him the day after his return :

'I have looked everywhere, J. M., for your fine medicine-chest, but I cannot find it. You have lost half your linen, just as I ex-

pected, and your clothes are in a frightful state, but you cannot surely have lost your beautiful medicine-chest, and that large bottle of opodeldoc in a wooden case which I got expressly; and I don't think you would give it away.'

'My dear, the medicine-chest is lost, I am sorry to say. It was stolen from me in Sicily. However, don't talk about it. I am very well, and that's the chief thing.'

'You may think yourself well, J. M., but if you don't take care you will be worse than ever. I wish you would now try some of my pills. You've vexed me enough of late. Do this to please me.'

'I shall think of it, my dear; but let me wait till I feel in want of them.'

Mrs. Argoll sighed to find that her husband had returned with an extraordinary aversion to drugs. This confirmed her in her opinion that he was greatly changed for the worse.

There is very little to relate that is worth recording as to the lives of the household in Palace Gardens after its members were reunited. A good many dinner-parties were

given. The young men who were amongst the guests admired Miss Solar as much as ever, but they did not venture to give expression to their feelings, as they had heard that she was engaged to be married. If any of them had supposed that Miss Tacon would have a provision when she married, and might have a chance of receiving a further sum from Mr. Argoll, they would have pressed their attentions upon her; but, as they believed her to be a poor dependent, they were able to resist the attraction of her good looks.

Miss Tacon found an unexpected sympathizer in her affliction. It has already been said that Miss Solar told Mr. Argoll at Westbourne how greatly her niece had been smitten with Lord John Cardonald. The more Mrs. Argoll reflected, the more she became convinced that a marriage between Lord John and her niece had been designed by an overruling Providence. She gloried in the anticipated pleasure of becoming closely connected with an old and aristocratic family; she was confident that such a con-

nection would gratify Mr. Argoll also, and she fancied that he would readily open his purse-strings again if, by so doing, he could bring it about. Therefore, when she found her niece moping a few days after hearing the letter read which Mr. Henry Argoll had sent to Miss Solar, she said:

'What's the matter, Ella? You don't look well. It's no use my offering you any medicine, because I know you won't take it; but, perhaps, you would like to see the doctor?'

'No, aunt, I don't want to see the doctor. He can't do me any good. I'm so unhappy!'

'Don't cry, child,' replied Mrs. Argoll, who went on to question her, and learned from her own lips all she had to tell about Lord John.

Mrs. Argoll was touched with the simple tale, and she cheered as well as astonished her niece by the motherly interest which she displayed. Miss Tacon expected that her aunt would scold her; instead of doing so, her aunt soothed her in the kindest way; she bade her take comfort and be of good cheer, and

rendered her almost happy. This was a pleasant omen. Miss Tacon felt more benefited by her aunt's sympathy than by all the affectionate speeches of her friend Berta. She knew that the latter detested Lord John, and that the former had a strong liking for him, and she believed that Mrs. Argoll was genuine in her sympathy, whilst Miss Solar was only trying to be cordial.

Yet Miss Solar had her troubles also. When at Frankfort or Franzensbad, Westbourne or Naples, she had other things to think of than her own misfortunes, but in Palace Gardens she found that she could think of nothing else. She had taken an aversion to painting. She hated entering her studio. The past was full of happiness. The present was dreary:—the future was dark. 'Oh, if he would only come back I should be less miserable!' was the frequent exclamation in which she indulged; and as weeks passed away, and there were no further tidings of Mr. Henry Argoll, she began to be seriously uneasy. She had never entirely believed in the loss of the *Cosmos*. So long

as details were wanting, she was buoyed up with hope. Even had no letter arrived she might have remained cheerful and unrepining, but the short letter which came had the effect of increasing her longing for fuller particulars. No address was given to which to forward a letter, so she could not indulge in the relief of pouring out her soul on paper. She really became nearly as wretched as Miss Tacon, and she had no one to comfort her, as Mrs. Argoll carefully avoided referring to her engagement, and Miss Tacon had her whole mind occupied with the possible condition of Lord John Cardonald.

No one in the household at Palace Gardens had done any other an injury, yet there was a sensation of domestic thunder in the air. Whether the brooding storm would burst or blow over was a problem. Each one seemed to be unsettled and uncertain what to do. Mr. Argoll, though the master of the house, was less of an autocrat than in the days before his visit to the Continent. Many of his rules about the internal management of his house seemed to have been tacitly sus-

pended. He had not repeated his orders with regard to the hours of eating, drinking, and going to bed. This pleased the servants, who used to groan under their master's irrational tyranny and fidgetiness. They thought 'master' greatly improved. Mrs. Argoll grew more puzzled as to why he was so different.

Mr. Argoll was the readier to submit to what he once would have condemned as foolish laxity, as he found that he was not less comfortable than before. It is fitting that a clock should keep correct time, but a house in which everything moves like clock-work is as repulsive as a prison. If Mr. Argoll had seen the world before beginning to keep house, he might never have tried to lay down rules which were at once dictatorial and senseless. It was easy for him to turn off the gas at midnight; he little knew that by so doing he caused an expenditure on candles below-stairs which increased the waste that he deprecated. Mrs. Argoll used to groan under the hard-and-fast rules which her husband laid down and enforced. Yet

she had become accustomed to them. Now she groaned as audibly as she used to do in spirit.

'I wish, J. M., you had never gone to Sicily,' she said more than once.

'I agree with you, my dear,' was his reply; and he added, with truth and fervour, 'I hope never to go there again.'

Mrs. Argoll had not succeeded in getting her husband to tell her the true story of his experience. He always shirked the task, being either too busy when she came to him in his study before dinner, or too sleepy when she spoke to him before going to bed. Being inclined to see visions and dream dreams, she imagined that her husband had something disgraceful to conceal, that he was both wicked and ashamed. Her mind was filled with the baseless suspicion that her staid, unattractive, unimpressionable husband was a very naughty man. If she had read the works of Richardson and Byron, she would have styled him a compound of Lovelace and Don Juan. When she upbraided him with sins of which he was innocent, and

charged him with having fallen a victim to fair charmers in Sicily and Italy, or, what was still worse, of having broken the hearts and ruined the lives of many ladies abroad, his protestations were not accepted as conclusive. On the contrary, they were held by her to be evidence of his guilt.

Unhappy man! He had his failings, but those with which his jealous wife charged him were the last of which there was a shadow of reason for even suspecting him. Yet Mrs. Argoll professed to be perfectly happy now that her husband was home again and under her own supervision. Mr. Argoll often wished himself back in the Gran Bretagna on the Chiaja in Naples. But he never had any wish, even when his wife tormented him almost beyond endurance, to return to the *Hôtel des Étrangers* in Nicata.

Autumn was succeeded by winter, and winter was passing away, yet nothing more was heard from South America. Mr. Argoll never showed any desire to learn the fate of his brother, but he repeatedly said:

'How strange it is that Lord John does

not write. I wish, after all, that his life had been insured. I begin to fear something is wrong.'

Miss Solar was in greater anxiety than he. It did not conduce to her contentment to observe the studied indifference which Mr. Argoll displayed as to the possible fate of all the members of the expedition. He seemed to think that if their lives were insured, it would not matter if they were eaten by the fishes or by cannibals.

Miss Solar had been disposed to pay her aunt Irma a visit at Christmas, and if her aunt had not replied that Frau Decker might think of calling at that time, she would have proceeded to Frankfort. Her prevailing impressions can be ascertained with perfect accuracy from the following letter which she wrote to her aunt, and to which she received the reply relating to Frau Decker which determined her to spend Christmas mournfully in Palace Gardens:

'Dearest Aunt Irma,

'I should so much like to see you again, and unless you have arranged for

anyone to visit you, I shall spend the Christmas in Frankfort. I am very wretched. Everybody in this house is quite changed. There are more parties than there used to be, yet they do not give me any excitement. Mr. Argoll says he is obliged to ask the City friends who have taken so much interest in him; and a strange lot they are. I never thought so many stupid men could have been brought together, or that so many men could have found wives to match them. The younger and unmarried men think it their duty to be agreeable to me by making speeches which show that they know that I am engaged. I hate to hear of my engagement! What is the use of it? Henry is away amongst the Patagonians; he may have married one of them by this time. As for Lord John Cardonald, I have no doubt that he has a large harem and is happy. I hinted this to Ella the other day, and she went almost frantic. For Lord John to do anything but what is right, seems to her to be one of the impossibilities of life.

'Mr. Argoll seems to have some grievance,

and Mrs. Argoll is nearly always out of temper. She used to be most placid in manner, but she seems to have heard something to the disadvantage of her husband which renders her snappish to a degree you can scarcely conceive. I have tried to paint again, but had to give it up. My studio seems a strange place to me now. I never enter it without thinking of the time when Henry was so good and charming, and the contrast is painful. I wish I knew where he is, and what he is doing. I had no fear for him whilst he was at sea, but now that he is travelling in Patagonia, and must really run great risks, I am oppressed with the dread that something may happen to him.

'I told you, I think, that Ella is bemoaning Lord John. Thus, what with my misery, Ella's grief for a man who cares nothing for her, Mr. Argoll's grumbling and Mrs. Argoll's crossness, we are anything but a happy family here. However, I live in constant expectation of the postman bringing me a letter which will render me indifferent to the sorrows of my neighbours; not

that I think Mr. and Mrs. Argoll have any reason to be put out, only they seem to torment each other for want of anything else to do. I shall not act so to Henry when he returns. If he should not, I must turn for consolation to you, dearest aunt. I feel sure you will do your best to comfort your disconsolate niece,

'BERTA.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

NEWS FROM PATAGONIA.

'The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountains, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm
By thoughts supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.'—WORDSWORTH.

'Accuse not Nature, she hath done her part:
Do thou but thine.'—MILTON.

CHRISTMAS was not a season of jollity in the Argoll household. The great Christian festival had never been to Mr. Argoll's taste. Business was suspended too long to suit his views. 'He had no children,' was the phrase which

issued from Macduff's lips, when the news reached him that Macbeth had slain his wife and little ones, the words being probably aimed at Malcolm, who, whilst sympathizing with him, could not, according to Macduff, sorrow so keenly as himself, because he was without wife or child. Mr. Argoll had a wife, but he had no children, and the absence of little ones was a reason why Christmastide was always so gloomy in his house. Christmas without children is like spring without flowers.

Perhaps, however, it was just as well that Mr. Argoll had no children. Their little lives would have been rendered wretched by him. As a thoroughly practical man, Mr. Argoll had always deprecated Christmas holidays; as a saving one, he had set his face against giving Christmas-boxes. If the ordering of the world's affairs had been in his hands, no one would have enjoyed any pause in the round of daily duties. It was only his conventional Christianity which had hindered him from protesting against Sunday being observed as a day of rest. As he could not do business at his office on that day, he had

vigorously opposed the opening of picture-galleries and museums. He was resolved that if he could not enjoy himself in his peculiar fashion, no one should have his help in enjoying themselves at all.

Miss Solar's training had led her to regard the Christmas week as a bright spot in her existence. As a child, she looked forward with eager expectation to the Christmas-tree, which, in accordance with inherited custom, her father had set up in his house every Christmas Eve, after his marriage and her birth. In this respect Mr. Solar followed the tradition of his own childhood. It was his custom and delight to give his daughter some unexpected treat on that occasion, and he was moved to do so by remembering the pleasure with which, when a boy, he had then received gifts from his parents. It is true his father and mother were too poor to load the small tree in their house with costly toys ; the gifts which they provided for him and his sister were simple and useful, yet he always valued the new cap or pair of shoes which he received on Christmas Eve far more than things of the

same kind when given to him at another season.

The first Christmas Eve after her father's death was spent by Miss Solar with her aunt Irma at Frankfort. Though she was no longer a child, her aunt thought that the sight of a Christmas-tree would be a treat; and she not only prepared one, but she had worked some things with her own hand which she knew her niece would value as coming from her, and which her niece accepted with the greater pleasure because they were presented as Christmas gifts. If Mr. Argoll's opinion had been asked, he would have pronounced this sheer tomfoolery. According to him life was far too earnest to be passed even for one evening in the year in a childish fashion. The whole duty of man, in his opinion, consisted in making money, and the chief end of women was to make men happy.

Miss Solar's German extraction and semi-German training had not fitted her for taking kindly to the sombre notions and arrangements which prevailed in Mr. Argoll's house at Christmastide. She could not understand

why he seemed annoyed when she spoke of the Christmas season as one of mirth and good fellowship. She combated his objections, but without convincing him that they were untenable.

'When you are as old, Berta, as I am, you will think differently,' was his rather ungracious speech.

'I don't mind getting old, Mr. Argoll!' was her reply; 'but when I am, I hope that I shall feel as I do now.'

'When I was young,' he went on to say, 'I used to think as you do; but experience is a great teacher, as I think someone has said. I am always thankful when Christmas is over, and then I am glad that business will go on regularly for twelve months without any interruptions but the wearisome Sundays and Bank Holidays.'

'I must say, J. M.,' interrupted his wife, 'I quite agree with Berta. When I was her age I thought as she does, and I still think so. You didn't object going off to enjoy yourself abroad for three months, and you shouldn't grudge other people a holiday now and then.'

Mr. Argoll said nothing; but he gave a grunt to signify that he regarded such speeches with contempt. Besides, the memory of his holiday was very different from what his wife supposed. She knew from long experience that when he was in a carping and contradictory mood she either had to hold her tongue or be prepared for a scene. Having a headache, she was not in the humour then for grappling with her husband. Miss Solar had uttered all that she cared to say, so she did not wish to prolong an unpleasant conversation. Miss Tacon, who was present, wisely said nothing, and her silence caused Mr. Argoll to think that she was a sensible girl who agreed with him.

Weeks followed each other, and the current of existence pursued its sluggish course in Palace Gardens. Every member of the house was anxious or weary, except its head, and he had nothing to complain of. His health continued good; he had not resumed the practice of taking quack medicines and calling upon his physician whenever he

fancied himself ill; his business flourished in the City; he was gaining money and popularity with unprecedented speed.

'What has happened to you, J. M.?' was Mrs. Argoll's frequent question; 'you seem quite an altered man. I could not have believed that your visit to Sicily would have changed you so greatly. I hope that nothing is going to happen.'

It should be noted that Mrs. Argoll had a theory that, when men or women were in robust health, and never took any drugs, they were running a risk of which they would repent some day. So long as they were ailing and drugging themselves, she regarded them as living a natural and comparatively healthy life. When condoling with her husband for continuing so well in health, he gruffly replied:

'Don't distress yourself about me, my dear; I shall let you know as soon as anything is wrong; but I don't see any need for medicine when I eat, and sleep, and feel so well as I do now.'

He tried now and then to make his wife

understand that the improvement in his bodily condition, which gave her such concern, was largely due to his journey and stay abroad. But she always rejected this explanation as utterly absurd. She feared that if that notion were implanted in his mind, he might again start for Sicily whenever he felt ill, and enjoy himself there in some improper way. She was certain that his reticence about his sojourn at Nicata was due to some attraction which he dared not avow.

On a morning early in February Miss Solar came down to breakfast sooner than usual. The gong had not sounded; if it had, Mr. Argoll would have entered the room before it ceased to vibrate, and taken up *The Morning Paper*, through which he always glanced whilst swallowing his breakfast. Being alone, and having nothing else to do, Miss Solar looked over the newspaper. Whilst so doing, her eye rested upon a telegram from Rio de Janeiro, which was headed, 'Revolution in Patagonia.' She read the telegram, which ran thus:

'The *Anaconda*, of the Shute and Stanwick Line, has just arrived, on its way from Valparaiso to Liverpool. It took some passengers on board at Punta Arenas who bring startling news. The Tehuelches, after resolving to declare their independence, have now joined together, and established the Republic of Patagonia. Some Englishmen who have been travelling in their country give them hopes that England will recognise the new Republic, and lend money to it. Chief amongst them are Lord John Cardonald, an eminent naval officer, and Mr. Henry Argoll, one of the leading British artists, both of whom are on their way home, and an agent of the Patagonian Republic accompanies them.'

When Mr. Argoll appeared, Miss Solar rushed forward in a state of excitement quite unusual to her, and thrusting the newspaper into his hand, she said:

'Do read that, Mr. Argoll! Oh, I'm so glad!'

He slowly read the telegram, and did not

seem either elated or pleased; he simply remarked:

'It's very strange that Lord John has not cabled me.'

That he was affected by the news was shown by his unconcealed desire to finish his breakfast and start for the City. On reaching Athelstane House he found a telegram for him, dated Rio, and sent by Lord John; it ran:

'Coming home; mines bosh; nitrate splendid; all right.'

This did not gratify him or satisfy his curiosity. However, he had practised the virtue of resignation till it had become almost a second nature, and he was prepared to await the return of the expedition, and hear from Lord John's own lips all that he had to tell.

A few days later Miss Solar could communicate to him a great deal more information, having received a very long letter from Mr. Henry Argoll. This letter had been posted at Punta Arenas, in a steamer bound direct

for France, and it reached England when the party, which had embarked on the *Anaconda*, was still sailing from Rio to Liverpool. Within ten days after the letter's arrival, the wanderers returned. Yet, as they had little more to tell of their personal experiences than is contained in Mr. Henry Argoll's letter, the more instructive passages may be extracted from it.

'Dearest Berta,

'We are back at Punta Arenas safe and sound, and, though we have had a few differences of opinion, we all agree in wishing ourselves home again. I wish I had read Commodore Muster's book before leaving England, as, if I had, I should probably have gone to the Black Forest, instead of taking part in a wild-goose chase. The others may have less cause for grumbling, as it seems not unlikely that something may come of the expedition which will repay its promoters.

'I have only time to give you a rapid sketch of my adventures; all the particulars are written at length in my Diary, and that

you may read, should you care to do so, when we meet again. I was bitterly disappointed with the scenery on entering the Straits of Magellan; there is nothing grand in the outlines of the rocks on either hand, the most striking thing of all being the distant view of snow-clad Mount Sarmiento in Tierra del Fuego. But the snow and the cold wind were not what I expected to find here. I had pictured South America down to Cape Horn as a tropical paradise, whereas I have found it to bear some resemblance to the coldest and most desolate part of North America, which I once saw. Indeed, there was much in our passage through a part of the Straits of Magellan which recalled a miserable passage I made in the autumn through the Straits of Belleisle.

'And what about the people, you will ask? Well, they are not so big as I had expected; a Patagonian is only the ordinary height of any other man. However, the swarms of vermin exceeded anything I could have fancied. The natives are not dirty in their habits, but it would seem that the more they

wash themselves the more are they overrun with irritating insects. I found them very hospitable, and those with whom we travelled to explore the country were especially so.

'Perhaps I had better tell you at once that I have had no little trouble in returning home ready to marry you as soon as my brother withdraws his objections, or when I can do so in spite of him. The truth is that an energetic Patagonian widow insisted upon marrying me; she announced her intentions in the most unblushing way, and my refusal might have led me into a scrape, as her friends would have killed me if I had insulted her by a point-blank refusal. Happily for me, the prospect of a fight with a hostile tribe caused the overtures to be broken off, and I had an escape, though a narrow one. My case was the reverse of that of the hero of "Locksley Hall," as a dusky woman wished to marry me, and I had the strongest possible objection to wed her. I hope that I shall never have any reason to regret my escape. She would have made a capital housekeeper, being skilled in pitching a toldo

—that is what the North American Indians call a wigwam—and in cooking meals at a moment's notice. So there is a hint for your guidance. I shall know where to find a devoted bride whenever I care to return to Patagonia, if the enterprising widow has failed to find a husband.

'You will probably like me to give you some notion of the appearance of the country through which we travelled. I have filled a book with rough sketches, being best able to make notes of my observations in that way, and you will form a better idea from my sketch-book of what I have seen than from all that I have written in my Diary. Besides, the accounts given in the book I have already mentioned, and in Darwin's "Voyage of the *Beagle*," both of which I read on board the *Cosmos*, are most accurate. I recommend you to read both books, as they give far better notions than anything I can write. I may copy three rather lumbering sentences from the first of these works, which give a correct view of what I saw.

'"The pampas of Patagonia occasionally

present a tolerably even and uniform succession of rolling plains covered with coarse grass, but more frequently the surface, even when unbroken by hills and suddenly yawning ravines, is sterile, with a sparse vegetation, consisting of stunted bushes and round thistle clumps, and even these are often wanting, and nothing clothes the bare patches of clay and gravel; elsewhere, it is strewn with huge round boulders, and again rugged with confused heaps or ridges of bare, sharp-edged rocks, many of them of volcanic origin: this particularly applying to the northern part of the country. The only uniformity of appearance is afforded in the winter, when the white sheet of snow covers the rocks, grass and shingle; but one accompaniment is the same, whatever be the nature of the soil or surface; and the word Pampa invariably recalls to one's shuddering memory the cutting blasts which sweep almost without interruption from various points, but chiefly from the west, over the high country, till reaching the heated atmosphere of Buenos Ayres, the cold Patagonian wind becomes

the Pampero, the sudden and terrific blasts of which cause so many disasters among the shipping. The descent from the Pampas to the valleys, or more sheltered and fertile level ground bordering the banks of the streams and rivers, so commonly called 'Barranca' or bank, from the scarped slopes, varying in depth from fifty to two or three feet, and in angle prove an easy to an almost perpendicular descent, but often fissured by ravines or gullies, affording roads, down all of which, however, the native riders gallop with equal recklessness."

'I was disappointed with the country, and thought it most uninteresting; I could not have believed that anything would have more closely resembled the picture in the first part of Dante's great poem. I told you once, I think, that Heine, whom I admire more than you do, threatened to make the King of Prussia suffer the penalty of the damned by pillorying him in a poem. If Heine had travelled through this region, he would have been perfectly pleased if the king whom he hated had been condemned to live in Patagonia.

'We had enough to eat when guanacos could be killed, or the eggs of an ostrich were found. It was no easy matter to kill guanacos, which fill the place here which antelopes do on the prairies of those western parts of America where they have not been exterminated like the buffalo, only the way of killing them is by a bolas, which is a Patagonian form of the sling with which David killed Goliath. I learned to use a sling when a boy, so I managed to handle a bolas even better than Lord John, who has a keen eye, but who could not succeed in whirling the balls across his head, and hurling them straight so well as I could, whilst, as he had been trained as a middy to throw ropes, he displayed a skill with the lasso which I envied.

'It has occurred to me that in telling you that guanacos fill the same place in Patagonia that antelopes do in parts of North America, I may make you think there is a similarity between them in other respects. That is not the case, with the exception of the flesh, which has a certain resemblance. They are not picturesque-looking animals, being like

an ass, on longer legs, and with a long neck. If I remember rightly, Darwin called them the "South American representatives of the camels of the East."

'When we did not have guanacos to eat, we were feasted on mare's flesh, which the Patagonians esteem as much as we do Dartmoor mutton. Whenever a child is born or anyone dies, the Patagonians kill several mares, and stuff themselves for days together till they cease to joy or grieve, and are then as fully occupied as an alderman in digesting the vast quantities of food which they have swallowed.

'You have often heard my brother complaining of headache after coming home from the City; at least, his wife has frequently told me that if she had not kept him well primed with pills, he would suffer from headaches even more than he did. I am happy to say that I do not know what they mean. If I did, I should prefer the treatment of the Patagonian medicine-men to that of my beloved sister-in-law. Whenever one complains of headache here, the Patagonian

doctor, who smells strongly enough to make his treatment as severe a trial as the worst surgical operation, takes one's head between his knees and gives an unearthly yell, or rather several yells in rapid succession, to frighten the devil out of one's head. I suppose that the devil cannot stand the awful din, as the patient at once declares that the devil, meaning his headache, has left him.

'I think that I have now told you the principal things you would care to hear about my adventures. When I show you my sketch of the widow who was so anxious to marry me, you will not feel at all jealous, and will think that I deserve to be congratulated upon having made my escape. I must add that nothing gave the widow greater pleasure than smoking a pipe, and the stronger the tobacco the more she seemed to enjoy herself. I know that you do not mind me smoking, but I hardly think that you would relish trying to keep company with my Patagonian widow in a smoking-match.

'Before finishing this rambling letter, which I scarcely think you will read through, or

saying anything about the special object of the expedition, I may add that, though I found the climate detestable, the people as savage as I had anticipated, and even less pleasant to associate with and to smell, and found their customs quite as trying, even when they meant no harm, as they could have been if they had been devised to frighten or sicken me to death, yet now and then I was not sorry to have made the journey. The sunsets were magnificent. If I could reproduce them on canvas the art critics, who do not understand what they write about, would ridicule them as they did *London in a Fog*, which was painted direct from Nature. Still I could only admire those sunsets, and bitterly regret that it was almost impossible to transfer them to canvas. What I admired nearly as much, and perhaps enjoyed still more, was to arrive, at the close of a long day's march, at what the Patagonians call the "Eyes of the Desert," which are circular springs, bubbling up from the white sand. Everybody enjoyed sitting on the margin of these beautiful fountains, with

their feet in the water, and watching the small fish flashing about. It was almost a reward for our weary journey to come upon these beautiful fountains of living water.

'Whether the result of the expedition will gratify my brother I cannot tell. Lord John says that one thing may prove remunerative. His report will be placed before the Syndicate. I suppose it will be both able and interesting. He has written it over several times, and it is because he wishes to present it in a final and perfect version that he will not send it by the steamer which takes this epistle, but will bring it with him. I fancy he will require a porter to carry it to Athelstane House, if it be as voluminous as I should expect, judging from the time and pains he has expended over it.

'In case this gets to England first, and my brother is anxious to hear a few facts, you may tell him that Mr. Pendragon, the mining expert, says there is nothing of value in the mines which he has visited. If anything valuable were ever in them, which he doubts, it has all been taken out. He also says

that there is a deposit of gold near Punta Arenas which is very rich, but this is not included in the property which the Syndicate was to acquire. There is also a coal-bed which would more than repay all the money which has been expended, but this, too, he thinks, is not included in the property. A bed of nitrate of soda which he saw, and which the new Patagonian Republic wish to give by way of security for a loan, he considered to be of immense value. As regards the Republic, I cannot say any more than that an Italian named Malero seems to be the moving spirit in founding it, and that a Patagonian called Chupato is the President—this fellow Malero being the Secretary of State, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and all the Ministers rolled into one. The Republic is said to have been established in a part of the country over which Chili and Buenos Ayres have contended for the supremacy, and which the Patagonians maintain is their own. At any rate they have founded a government, which Malero says has been recognised by the United States on the ground

that if the United States did not do so, England would. He says that even if England should refuse, he is sure to find some people in the City to advance money to the Patagonians who are struggling to be free, and who have plenty of nitrate of soda to pledge by way of security for paying their debts. I do not profess to understand these things. Lord John avers that he will not meddle in them. Unfortunately, Malero sticks to me far closer than any brother, as far as my experience goes; he promises me plenty of money if I introduce him to my brother, of whom he has heard. I have had to consent to introduce him, whilst making a condition that I shall have nothing to do with his loan, and that I am not to receive any payment for what I may do for him. I shall be satisfied if my brother adds to his wealth by helping this authorized representative of the Patagonian Republic, and I shall be still better pleased when Malero ceases to bother me and to call me his dearest friend. The worst of it is, that the fellow counts upon my acting as

interpreter for him. He took to me because I could speak Italian. That, you see, is one of the disadvantages of knowing any other language than one's own. If you are as tired of reading this as I am of writing it, you will sleep soundly. If you do, I hope that you may have pleasant dreams of your devoted and loving

'HENRY.'

When Mr. Argoll heard that Miss Solar had received the foregoing letter from his brother, he made no other remark than 'Indeed!' When she asked him whether he would like to read the letter, he replied:

'I am very busy, Berta, but if you put it on the table in my study, I may perhaps find a moment to glance over it.'

He had not the candour to avow that he was dying to read it, or the honesty to admit that, when he entered his study and found the letter there, he read it through at once. The impression made upon him was great and unexpected. He had cherished the notion that his brother was a harum-scarum fellow

who painted pictures or criticized them as an interlude in a rollicking existence, that he was deficient alike in steadiness and common-sense, and that he had not the faintest turn for real business in any form. A perusal of this letter changed his mind.

'After all,' he said to himself, 'that fellow is no fool. He writes in a clear and straightforward style. Byker could not have done better.'

This had become Mr. Argoll's highest kind of praise. Since Mr. Byker's death his merits were recognised and magnified to an extent unknown during his lifetime. Though thinking thus, Mr. Argoll was too proud to admit that his opinion had been altered or modified, or to say a kindly word to Miss Solar about his absent brother.

After keeping the letter three days he returned it, saying:

'I have just managed to skim the letter, Berta. As far as I can judge, Henry has been quite in his element; he was always a wild and wandering fellow.'

This was unjust, as Mr. Argoll well knew,

yet he had not the smallest compunction in saying it. It cut Miss Solar to the quick, but she could dissemble her feelings; so instead of giving Mr. Argoll the opportunity to add something still more bitter in reply to the defence which he expected her to offer, she simply said: 'Thanks, Mr. Argoll,' and left the room, bravely repressing her tears till she was in her bedchamber. She had gradually ceased to like Mr. Argoll; she was now beginning to hate him.

When Lord John Cardonald arrived and handed his report to Mr. Argoll, the latter found little in it which he had not already read in his brother's letter. Lord John had not lost his official style of putting things, and the official style is admirably designed for making a document a piece of rigmarole. Even if the report were as light and sparkling as one of Elia's essays it would be unnecessary to do more with it at present than to extract the conclusion, which was that the story told by Señor Barcallos was, in the main, a fiction sparsely sprinkled with facts. Lord John added that

as the Republic of Patagonia had sent an agent to England, further details could be obtained from him.

Had it not been that an agent empowered to borrow money for the Republic on the security of the deposit of nitrate of soda which the Government possessed, or at least laid claim to, had returned with the expedition, the expedition itself would have been an utter failure. However, Mr. Argoll was in high spirits. He was to issue a loan for the Republic of Patagonia, and he counted upon obtaining a large sum by doing so. It somewhat annoyed him to find that Signor Malero would not settle anything unless his brother were present, and either interpreted what was said or translated what was written.

'Confound the fellow!' thought Mr. Argoll. 'The next thing I shall hear will be a demand from Henry for a share in the commission. What business has he to interfere with my profit?'

Mr. Henry Argoll was profoundly annoyed to have to go into the City and help Signor

Malero, whom he warmly wished in Patagonia, or an equally unpleasant place.

Mr. Argoll used all his influence to get the Foreign Secretary to recognise the independence of the new Republic. The United States had done so promptly, in order not to be anticipated by the United Kingdom. Indeed, the great Republic of the West is always ready to hold out the right hand of fellowship to a petty republic in any corner of the globe, whilst the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, though sympathizing with nations struggling for liberty, is sometimes slow to admit that their freedom has entitled them to the privileges as well as the powers of self-government.

There are financiers in the City of London who have no scruples about raising a loan for any state or republic, however petty and contemptible. The public finds the cash; they pocket the commission. Sometimes they pocket the whole. One little South American State piteously complained that, though it was held responsible for a loan of upwards of a million

sterling, not a farthing was ever paid to it, all the money obtained from the English public, on its behalf, being intercepted by the financiers. Mr. Argoll condemned this as being sharp practice; he disapproved of keeping to himself and distributing among his friends any more than what he considered to be a fair share of the proceeds. The Patagonian loan was for a million and a half sterling; the financiers and their friends showed so much self-denial as to content themselves with pocketing half a million for their trouble in asking the public to subscribe the money.

CHAPTER XXX.

MORE LOVE-MAKING.

VENUS. Sweet shepherd, didst thou ever love?
PARIS. Lady, a little once.
VENUS. And art thou changed?
PARIS. Fair Queen of Love, I loved not all at once.
VENUS. Well, wanton, wert thou wounded as deep as some have been,
It were a cunning cure to heal, and rueful to be seen.
GEORGE PEELE—*The Arraignment of Paris.*

TWO days after the return of the expedition from Patagonia, Mr. Argoll asked his brother and Lord John to dine at Palace Gardens. The party was given in honour of Signor Malero, with whom Mr. Argoll desired to keep on good terms. Being unable to converse with him, he could not ask him alone, so he

had to invite his brother to act as interpreter, and he requested Lord John to join them.

Never, since Miss Solar had become an inmate of her guardian's house, was she so excited as on the day of this dinner-party. As for Miss Tacon, her state cannot be described in sober words. She was half hysterical all day, though she was not naturally given to lose her head and make what is called an 'exhibition of herself.' She was able to control her feelings and to retain her composure in ordinary circumstances, not giving vent to her emotion in any other form than that of entries in her Diary.

Mr. Henry Argoll had not seen Miss Solar since his return; however, several notes had passed between the engaged lovers: Miss Tacon had neither seen nor communicated with Lord John Cardonald. Mr. Henry Argoll and Miss Solar agreed not to give Mr. Argoll an excuse for harsh conduct or still harsher sayings by meeting in London without his consent. They had arranged between themselves that she should

pay a visit to her aunt Irma, and that he should then have a pressing call to Frankfort. To both it was an agreeable surprise to have the opportunity of meeting, with Mr. Argoll's knowledge and at his own instance, under his roof. They little knew that, if he could have prevented this, he would have done so. Not only were they pleased, but they were both disposed to think that he had relaxed in his opposition to their marriage.

By some mistake, owing possibly to his watch having been affected by the sea-voyage, Mr. Henry Argoll arrived at Palace Gardens half an hour too soon. Neither his brother nor his sister-in-law was in the drawing-room to welcome him, yet he did not find the half-hour at all wearisome, as Miss Solar, having finished dressing for dinner much sooner than was necessary or customary, was seated in the conservatory reading a volume of Heine's poems. She was not startled when Mr. Henry Argoll entered, and he was pleased to notice that she had taken to read one of his favourite German authors. What they said to each

other has little interest to anyone else. The time passed so swiftly that before they thought they had been together five minutes, half an hour had elapsed, and the others who were to form the party had assembled in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Argoll's reception of Lord John Cardonald was most cordial. He shook hands with Miss Tacon, who looked at him with an amazement which she could scarcely conceal. The excitement had brightened her up, and she looked her best.

'By Jove, what a devilish pretty girl she is!' was Lord John's inward comment; perhaps his own words, which he audibly repeated afterwards to Mr. Henry Argoll after dinner, may be reproduced without offence.

He was specially impressionable at the moment; besides, he had not given any heed to Miss Tacon's looks whilst his thoughts were directed towards Miss Solar. The latter was most gracious to him. She was too natural, as well as too happy, to be shy and stiff; indeed, she had almost forgotten the

episode between them when they last met, so she held out her hand and said :

'I am glad to see you back, Lord John. How well and young you look !'

'Thanks, Miss Solar,' was his reply ; he added, in a tone of which she felt the meaning :

'It is your turn to pay compliments. I must say I do not object to them.'

They said no more, as Mrs. Argoll desired Lord John to sit on the sofa and tell her all about his health. Somewhat to her disappointment, he assured her that he had never felt better. Their conversation ended almost as soon as it had begun, as dinner was announced. Signor Malero, being the guest of the evening, took Mrs. Argoll in to dinner ; they had to communicate with each other by signs, as neither knew a word of the other's language.

Lord John was appointed to escort Miss Solar, and they went off and sat together without either of them displaying the slightest embarrassment. Indeed, whilst descending the stairs, Lord John said a few

words which made his peace with her, and almost made her regret having acted or spoken unkindly to him.

'I hope, Lord John,' she said, 'that you and Mr. Henry Argoll got on well together.'

'If we had not,' he replied in cheery and evidently sincere strains, 'the fault would have been entirely mine. He is a first-rate fellow, and we are now great friends. No one can help getting on well with him.'

Though this was as complimentary a speech as Lord John had ever addressed to a woman, and Miss Solar had an invincible repugnance to compliments, she would now have admitted, if closely pressed, that complimentary speeches sometimes gave her pleasure when they were properly put. She made what amends she could by saying everything that she thought would please Lord John, and she even referred to his favourite story of the 'Water-spout,' one which she had often heard, and about which she had ridiculed him behind his back.

'No, Miss Solar, even you won't tempt me to tell that story again. I suppose I must

have told it badly or mixed it up somehow, because one day, on board the *Cosmos*, as we were nearing land, I passed the smoking-room door and heard some one say, "Lord John ain't a bad fellow if it were not for that beastly 'Water-spout;' I wish it had drowned him and his ship;" and I made an inward vow never to tell the story again.'

The change in Lord John was not confined to his manner of paying compliments and telling stories; it was as marked in his personal appearance. It was the latter to which Mr. Henry Argoll referred in the letter which occasioned Miss Tacon many perplexed and dreary hours. The truth is, he had ceased to be the dark-haired Adonis that he was before his departure. His beard and moustache had grown to a fair length; he used to be clean shaven, with the exception of small whiskers trimmed after the naval model. A moustache or a beard changes the look of a man's face; but when hair which was jet-black becomes a light red tinged with gray, the change is still more striking. Strangely enough, he did not look

older; on the contrary, he now appeared younger than his years, the colour of his skin harmonizing with that of his hair.

Miss Tacon could not keep her eyes off Lord John. In her opinion the change in his looks was due to the hardships which he had undergone, and she both pitied and admired him the more on that account. She was the subject of a talk between Mrs. Argoll and Lord John when the company assembled again in the drawing-room, and when Mrs. Argoll resumed her questions about his health.

'But, dear Lord John, have you never suffered all the time you have been away?' she asked him, with a genuine desire to learn the truth.

'Not once,' he replied almost unfeelingly, 'have I had an ache or pain.'

She felt sorry for him, sighed, and remarked:

'Well, I don't know what is happening to you men. You know that you used to be often ill, and I am most thankful that my medicine did you so much good.'

Lord John was too wary to interrupt her,

and avow that he had carried her medicine away with him but had never taken any of it.

She continued:

'There's my husband, now. Before he went to Sicily he was always complaining, and I used to cure him. He took a large medicine-chest with him, and he lost it; and since he has come back he never will take one of my pills, and yet he seems quite well. I really don't understand it.'

Lord John did not care to hear any more of the same facts, and he knew that when once Mrs. Argoll began to ride her hobby it ran away with her. Miss Tacon had sat down to the piano as Mr. Argoll requested her; and he did this because he thought that whilst she played there would be no need for carrying on a fragmentary conversation, through the medium of his brother, with Signor Malero. For lack of any more original remark, Lord John observed:

'How well your niece plays; she seems to have made great progress since I last heard her.'

This was flummery; he had never paid any heed to her playing before, and his knowledge of music was confined to knowing, or rather inferring, when the National Anthem was performed. However, Mrs. Argoll, as her manner was, chose to invest Lord John with all good qualities, and she said:

'I am very glad you think so. I have noticed that Ella is improving, and as you agree with me there can be no doubt of it.'

She had not paid any more heed to her niece's playing than Lord John, and she was nearly as bad a judge as he. Their combined knowledge of music would have been correctly represented by a minus quantity. However, if literal truth had to be spoken in a drawing-room immediately before and after dinner, the conversation would flag still more than it does when the aid of fiction is freely invoked. Having looked attentively at Miss Tacon, and being again struck with her good looks, he inquired:

'Is not your niece changed since I saw her last? She seems to me really a pretty girl now.'

'You men have sharper eyes than any woman for these things, Lord John; though perhaps it is because I see Ella day after day that I don't notice the improvement in her. Poor thing! she has been out of spirits lately. Indeed, since she refused the Rev. Basil Tepper at Westbourne she has not been at all the same girl.'

'Refused a parson, did she? That shows her good sense, Mrs. Argoll.'

Lord John entertained a sailor's prejudices when there was a question of marriage between a clergyman and a charming girl; both sailors and soldiers thinking that Providence has ordained that all the pretty girls should fall to their lot.

'But I am glad to say, Lord John, that my niece can choose for herself, now that she is quite independent.'

The music ended; the guests moved about, and the talk between Mrs. Argoll and Lord John ended also.

'By Jove!' he said to himself. 'So she is independent, is she? That alters the case. I always thought she hadn't a rap; but

perhaps old Argoll is going to adopt her. And she is deucedly good-looking, upon my word.'

The subject occupied his mind again, and after reflection he arrived at the conclusion that Miss Tacon's style of beauty was really more to his taste than Miss Solar's.

The image of Miss Tacon was impressed on his mind when he returned to his rooms in Duke Street that evening. He could think of nothing else when he sat at breakfast the following morning, and the more he thought, the more firmly did the conviction take root that she could be the wife to him which he wished to possess, and for which he had sought in vain. He was now doubtful whether Miss Solar would have made him happy; first, because he was half afraid of her; second, because he had not the remotest chance of becoming her husband. John Locke says that however much a man may be in love with a princess whom he is not allowed to approach, he manages to get over his passion, and to find a sufficient satisfaction in a wife of a lower rank. Whatever is out

of reach cannot be worth troubling about, is a maxim which would suit a fox, a philosopher, and a forlorn lover.

As the result of carefully considering the matter, Lord John came to the conclusion that he ought to see Mrs. Argoll again and have a further talk with her. He could easily enlist her sympathy by alleging that he had been seized with a sudden and inexplicable pain. She would have no hesitation in providing a remedy in the shape of her favourite pills to be swallowed, and of her liniment to be applied externally. She had the abiding belief in her nostrums which was characteristic of the ages of faith. No failures ever made her blame the physic; the fault always lay with the patient if no good result followed from taking it. She was certain in such a case that the patient either did not employ the remedy in time, or else did not persevere in using it. An inestimable advantage possessed by amateur doctors over those who are trained and experienced is that they are too ignorant to be cognizant of their own blunders.

Inspired with a desire to perpetrate a pious fraud upon Mrs. Argoll, Lord John went to Palace Gardens about the hour of luncheon. He used to be welcome there at that hour, and he inferred that, on the present occasion, he would not be sent empty away. After his reconciliation, or, rather, tacit understanding with Miss Solar, there was no longer any reason why he should not resume his old habit of calling at Palace Gardens when he was not otherwise engaged, and passing an hour or two as unprofitably there as he might do in any other house or at either of his clubs.

The footman who opened the door ushered him into the drawing-room as a matter of course. Lord John did not ask any question about Mrs. Argoll being at home. The footman supposed that now, as in former days, he came by invitation. If he had inquired for Mrs. Argoll he would have been told that she had gone out. As her custom was, she was taking a walk before luncheon for her health's sake, having latterly made it a rule not to use her carriage till after luncheon.

Her increasing tendency to grow stout had alarmed her, and caused her to indulge in violent exercise as a prophylactic.

Miss Solar was in her studio intently turning over the sketches which Mr. Henry Argoll had made in Patagonia, and she was looking forward to reading his Diary, which he had forwarded along with them that morning. Miss Tacon, who had no new book to read, was seated at the piano in the drawing-room practising some of the pieces which would have a sedative, if not a soporific, effect upon Mr. Argoll in the evening. She did not hear the door open and the footman announce Lord John. Not seeing Mrs. Argoll or Miss Solar, he quietly advanced to the piano and said :

'Industrious as usual, Miss Tacon.'

She looked up and gave a start.

'Pray don't move,' he added ; 'I should like you to continue playing. I have heard so little music for some time that listening to you will be quite a treat.'

Though enjoying the compliment, Miss Tacon was too nervous to go on practis-

ing. She really could not play any more, so, rising from the piano, she said, with an unsteady voice :

'How you startled me, Lord John!' and then went towards the button of the electric bell, saying : 'I will inquire whether Mrs. Argoll has come in. I am sure, if she had dreamt of your calling, she would not have gone out for a walk.'

He quickly said :

'Pray do not trouble yourself to ring, Miss Tacon. I am in no hurry, and I can wait till she returns;' and then, being somewhat at a loss what to say next, he added, in a confused manner : 'I really didn't know that Mrs. Argoll was not at home.'

Speaking rapidly to conceal her agitation, Miss Tacon said :

'Oh, Lord John, I am sure my aunt would be very sorry if she came in and found that you had called without seeing her ; perhaps, then, you will stay till she comes back? I don't think she will be long; luncheon will be ready in a few minutes. I cannot tell why Berta is not in the room ; she has not

gone out. May I go and tell her that you are here ?'

'Please do not trouble yourself, Miss Tacon. I shall not weary till Mrs. Argoll and Miss Solar come back.'

Lord John was not easily nonplussed. Indeed, a more collected man or a cooler seaman did not exist; yet, for the moment, he was at a loss for words. Miss Tacon was painfully nervous, and her dominant desire was to rush out of the room. After a short pause, which seemed an eternity to her, he began to speak, and said: 'So I hear you have been staying at Westbourne. I rather liked the place for a short time, but I soon found it tiresome, as the people were always squabbling over their favourite clergymen. Does that still go on ?'

'Yes, it's worse than ever, I should say. I was sick of the place, and of the clergy too.'

'Surely, Miss Tacon, you have no dislike for clergymen ? I have always heard that young girls prefer them to soldiers and sailors. Isn't that true ?'

'How can you say such a thing, Lord John!

For my part, I think clergymen perfectly horrid—out of church, of course.'

'Well, Miss Tacon, I like them best in church also, so then we are of the same mind; but I rather think you are too strong in your phrases. I know some clergymen who are capital fellows.'

'Then, Lord John, you have never been lectured by them. Those at Westbourne seem to think me very wicked because I do not care to spend my days amongst poor people, who smell so horribly.'

'If you dislike bad smells, you would not do to spend much time on board a ship where there is much bilge-water. All the poor people you have visited would never make you feel so uncomfortable.'

'Oh, that's quite another matter. I love bad smells on board ship. And sailors are so different from clergymen.'

'Please don't flatter me, Miss Tacon; you forget, perhaps, that I am a sailor.'

'Oh, don't be offended, Lord John; I did not mean it.' She said this with an effort; her tongue had run on faster than she had in-

tended, though it faithfully reproduced her inmost thoughts. Her manner, her enthusiasm, her evident sincerity, and even her confusion, worked upon Lord John in a powerful yet not an uncommon fashion, the result being that he partially lost his self-possession, and said, almost without knowing or being aware of it :

'Then, Miss Tacon, would you marry a sailor ?'

'Yes,' she instantly said; and then, blushing at her impetuosity, she added : 'I mean I should prefer to marry a sailor rather than a clergyman.'

'I hope, then, you will not refuse to marry me.'

'You ! Lord John !' she exclaimed, with as great surprise as if she had been told that the world was to come to an end the next moment, adding : 'Surely you cannot be in earnest !'

'I am always in earnest, Miss Tacon,' was his reply ; and as he said this he took her by the hand, and he might have kissed her, when the door opened, and Mrs. Argoll appeared.

Lord John had regained his self-control, and his natural assurance stood him in good stead now. He at once said :

'I am very glad you have come, Mrs. Argoll. I have been kept in painful suspense to know whether your niece will become my wife, but I hope she will soon relieve me of my pain, and make me one of the happiest of men.'

'Give you pain, Lord John! not for worlds!' was Miss Tacon's exclamation ; and being unable to control her feelings, and half crying out of excess of joy, she rushed out of the room. The gong sounded for luncheon in the course of ten minutes. She came into the drawing-room a few minutes later ; her aunt rose from her seat, kissed her, saying :

'I congratulate you, Ella ;' and added, 'this is your seat now,' placing her next to Lord John, who seemed glad that he had no other speeches to make. Miss Solar was absent, being so greatly absorbed in Mr. Henry Argoll's Diary as not to have heard the gong. The footman was sent to tell her that luncheon was ready. She came in hurriedly,

and, glancing at the faces of the other persons in the room, said :

'Dear me, you all look upset. I hope nothing is the matter?'

Lord John, who had risen as she entered, stepped forward and said :

'Allow me to dispel your fears, Miss Solar ; nothing very sad has happened. Let me now have the pleasure of presenting to you my future wife,' bowing, as he said this, to Miss Tacon.

Miss Solar went up to her in her dignified manner, and said, as she kissed her :

'Dearest Ella, this is good news. I am sure you will be very happy.'

Not much luncheon was eaten by anyone except Lord John, who was neither too excited, nor so overjoyed as to have lost his appetite. When it was over he took his leave, as he saw by the manner of the ladies that they did not desire him to stay longer. He promised, at Mrs. Argoll's request, to return to dinner.

'It is my turn now,' she said, 'to have a chat and give you good advice.'

He agreed to dine, but he inwardly prayed that Mrs. Argoll might not insist on his taking a course of her pills as a preparation for his marriage.

He thought it prudent to see Mr. Argoll before the latter had a conversation with his wife, as he wished Mr. Argoll to suppose that no hint of Miss Tacon being other than a penniless orphan had reached his ears. Lord John was largely endowed with the cautiousness of his race and native land. He always took thought for the morrow, and for eventualities which might affect his interests. He now said to himself:

'Argoll is so infernally suspicious, and he seems to think that nobody but himself should think of getting a little money in any way. When I wanted to marry Miss Solar he moralized about the iniquity of being a fortune-hunter, as if it were the worst of crimes. I don't think he is quite the man to refrain from marrying for money if he had the chance. However, if he is generous for once in his life, I shall not be badly off. Ella seems really a nice girl, and I don't

think she will ever develop into such a dictatorial damsel as Miss Solar, who has an unpleasant way of taking the conceit out of one. You will find that to your cost one day, Henry, my boy, or I am very much mistaken.'

Whilst thoughts like these were coursing through Lord John's mind, a hansom was conveying him to Athelstane House. On arriving there he found Mr. Argoll disengaged and in a good-humour, having just had a message from the Foreign Office to the effect that the recognition of the Republic of Patagonia would take place very soon. He knew that when this recognition was announced there would be an instant and great rise in the price of Patagonian bonds. He had profited by the loan in a double sense. He had been still further enriched by issuing it, and he had bargained for his firm having the control over the deposit of nitrate of soda which was the security for its repayment. By controlling the working and sale of this deposit he saw his way to making a further profit. Moreover, he was lauded

in the papers as a public benefactor, inasmuch as the price of the nitrate of soda brought from Patagonia was to be nearly one-half that charged for the same fertilizer from other places, and thus the struggling British farmer would be benefited by his patriotic action. Mr. Argoll enjoyed the rare and happy consciousness of both making money and getting undeserved credit for doing a service to his fellow-countrymen.

'Well, Lord John, do you want to be a director of a company again?' was his greeting, uttered in a cordial strain.

'God forbid, Argoll! I'd rather go back to Patagonia.'

'If you care to do so I can give you a chance. I shall want some one to superintend the working of this deposit of nitrate of soda; but that, my lord, may not be in your line.'

'No, indeed! I mean to make the best of my small means to live here. I have never been an economical chap, and I am going to try an experiment which a friend once tried, and found it answer. When he could not

make two ends meet he took a wife, and she managed to make him comfortable. To be sure, he had to give up racing and all sorts of amusements, and this he did not like at first; but now he seems to be reconciled; and though he never plunges as he used to do, he enjoys a quiet rubber every afternoon at the club, and says he can afford it, which was not the case before his marriage.'

Mr. Argoll was not greatly edified by this speech, which was a much longer one than he had heard before from Lord John Cardonald. His reflection took this form: 'What on earth can he be driving at? If he is fool enough to marry, what is that to me?' Instead of saying this aloud, he remarked:

'I quite agree with you, my lord. Your sentiments are those upon which I should act were I in your place. I was a poor man when I married, and I have had no reason to regret it.'

Lord John had not the argumentative advantage of knowing that Mr. Argoll had married his wife thinking her to be a great

heiress, and regarded himself as a victim when he found at her father's death that the anticipated fortune was non-existent. He continued:

'Perhaps, Argoll, I should not trouble you with my own affairs; but I thought you might like to know that I have proposed to Miss Tacon to-day and have been accepted, and I hope you will not object to a connection which brings our families together.'

'What, my lord, do you mean to marry Ella? Wonders will never cease—I never dreamt of such a thing!'

'Nor did I till I came back from Patagonia, and saw what a very pretty girl she was. I may have been foolish and rash in proposing to her, but that can't be helped now. Somehow or other I don't think I shall have any reason to repent it.'

Mr. Argoll rose from his chair, went to the one where Lord John was sitting, shook him heartily by the hand, and said:

'You will never regret it, Lord John, if I can help it. Ella is an excellent girl; and though I do not mean to make any rash

promise, I may assure you that she will have something which will help you to keep house.'

'You are a regular trump, Argoll,' was the cordial reply.

A clerk knocked at the door, and when called to come in, he brought the card of a man whom Mr. Argoll wished specially to see, so he said to Lord John:

'You will dine with us to-night, my lord, and then we shall have another talk.'

Lord John left Athelstane House more convinced than when he entered it that the nice girl whom he was to marry would not prove a penniless orphan.

Mr. Argoll went home earlier than was his custom, as he wished to have a talk with his wife before meeting Lord John at dinner. She told him what had occurred, so far as she knew. He told her what Lord John had said to him.

'I think,' was her reply, 'it will be a good match for Ella, as, notwithstanding Lord John is so poor, he belongs to an old family, and that is always something.'

'You forget, my dear,' he replied, 'that my family is quite as old as Lord John's, only there is less known about it. Perhaps when he marries Ella we shall get the position in society to which we are entitled.'

Curiously enough, Mr. Argoll had become increasingly anxious to get what he called a position in society, since his wealth had multiplied. He now saw his way to making plenty of money, as the more he had the easier he found it to add to his store; money breeds money; the chief difficulty is at the outset. A supply of eggs cannot be ensured till one has a sufficient number of cocks and hens; after the poultry have been procured, the eggs come without further trouble. Mr. Argoll now felt that he was a power in the money-market, wherein thousands who have small sums become the victims of the few who gather large ones. A wealthy financier is in the position of the keeper of a gaming-table: the larger the number of players the greater are his gains. He runs no risk; his profit is an absolute certainty.

As the uncle by marriage of Lord John

Cardonald, who might any day become the Earl of Armadale, Mr. Argoll would be a still more important personage in his own estimation, and in that of those persons who constitute society, than he had been before. Hence he told his wife, as the result of his reflections since his interview with Lord John :

'My dear, this marriage must be made the most of. I think better of Lord John than I have yet done, seeing that he is ready to take Ella without a penny. I am convinced that he has no mercenary motive. I thought he had in the case of Berta ; but then he knew she was an heiress. I hate persons who marry simply to see how much they can get by it. The curse of the young men of the present day is that they are always thinking of rich matches. If I had not been sure that Lord John knows nothing about what I intend to do for Ella, I should not think so highly of him ; but now there can be no mistake. He is evidently smitten with Ella's good looks, and I do not wonder at it. She is different from Berta, but to

my mind she is far prettier. What I mean to do is this. Instead of the interest on the ten thousand pounds which I have settled on Ella being all I shall pay, I mean to make it as many thousands; and I rather think Lord John will be nearly as well off as his brother, who I suppose is as hard up as most peers at present, and Scotch ones in particular.'

His wife kissed him, and said :

'J. M., you are a real darling. I have always thought you the best husband in the world, and the kindest of men.'

'Then say no more now, my dear,' was his comment. He enjoyed the praise, and no man felt more keenly than he how pleasant it was to have his good intentions properly appreciated.

After dinner, when the ladies had left the dining-room, Mr. Argoll repeated to Lord John what he had told his wife, and Lord John felt perfectly satisfied with his day's work. When he and Mr. Argoll returned to the drawing-room Miss Tacon was not there. Miss Solar had left her accus-

tomed seat in the conservatory, and Miss Tacon took it. Lord John found the place a convenient one for making himself agreeable to the lady of his heart, who listened with undissembled rapture to all his speeches.

Before she had been many minutes in her bedroom that night, Miss Tacon realized that she was a more important personage than she had been when she got up in the morning. Mrs. Argoll had a maid; Miss Solar had one also; but Miss Tacon had to shift for herself. Sometimes Mrs. Argoll's maid, Fanny, would condescend to help Miss Tacon to dress or undress on the occasion of a great entertainment, but she did this grudgingly, and only because her mistress ordered her. Mrs. Argoll had told her niece to make use of Fanny's services whenever she required them, but she had never ventured to ask Fanny to help her, preferring to appeal to Pauline, Miss Solar's maid, who was always willing and ready to attend upon her, even though she were but a poor dependent. To-night, however, Fanny came into the room and begged, almost as

a favour, to be allowed to help Miss Tacon to undress. The other servants were as marked in their change of manner to one who was to be Lady John Cardonald very soon, and might become the Countess of Armadale. Servants are not behind their masters and mistresses in worshipping success.

To express Miss Tacon's feelings is impossible. She could not do so herself. She tried to add a paragraph to her Diary, but she was unable to hold the pen. She was so happy that she could do nothing but cry, and never had she passed a more restless night, even when she thought herself the most wretched of created beings. She felt remorse as well as unbounded joy.

'To think,' she said to herself, 'that I should have once envied Berta! Now I would not exchange places with her, and I can never forget her kindness in refusing darling Lord John.'

Miss Solar was undoubtedly unhappy, though she was not plunged into the depths of despair from which Miss Tacon had suddenly emerged. She was perfectly sincere

in congratulating her friend. Her last talk with Lord John had elevated him in her estimation, and she was nearly as gratified as Miss Tacon that the marriage would take place. Whilst not convinced that Lord John would prove a model husband, she was confident that Miss Tacon would be a pattern and loving wife to him.

As her custom was when she had anything to write which would interest her aunt Irma, she penned a few lines to her before going to bed:

'DEAREST AUNT IRMA,

'A wedding is to take place in this house, though I am sorry to say it is not mine. Of course, you remember all that I have told you about Lord John Cardonald, and how my friend Ella has been dying to marry him. That she would ever have had the chance was what I never thought possible, and yet they are engaged; and at dinner today Mr. Argoll drank their health and much happiness as man and wife. I was afraid that Ella would do some foolish thing when

Mr. Argoll was speaking; she looked as if she could jump off her chair with uncontrollable delight. I hope, poor thing, she will not lose her head altogether. She keeps saying, "I am so happy, I don't know what to do." I have no doubt she will make an affectionate little wife, and I must say that I think better of Lord John than I did, as he seems much less affected—his hair is now its natural colour, which greatly improves his appearance. I confess I do not quite understand how he can afford to marry, as he has got little except his half-pay, which is small, and Ella has got nothing. Mr. Argoll may give her something, but I have learned enough of him by this time to know that he will never part with a farthing unless obliged, or unless he will get something in return by doing so.

'Though not going to be married yet, I am far happier than I was when I wrote a week ago, as Henry has come back looking the picture of health; indeed, I cannot believe that he is not ten years younger than his brother. He really does not seem

a year older than that poor young Russian who, as you may remember, always followed us at Franzensbad, and who was not twenty.

Henry has brought home a large number of most interesting sketches; but he does not seem inclined to begin painting the great picture which he wished to do before he went on his voyage. He is terribly worried by his brother about some scheme for making money. He says that he wishes he had never gone near Patagonia. So do I. We have only once had a good long talk since his return, and he is more convinced than ever that his brother will always refuse his consent to our marriage, so we must wait patiently for many years. Oh! if my poor papa had known that Mr. Argoll was so hard-hearted he would never have placed me in his power. The worst of it is that he appears to think he is acting for my good.

'How I envy Ella, who has no money, and who is going to marry the man on whom her heart is set! I cannot go on here as I am. I have told Henry, and he quite agrees with me that I shall be much more comfortable

with you, dear aunt; so I intend telling my guardian that I mean to pay you a very long visit. He cannot object, I am sure. Only I must bargain for not seeing Frau Decker very often; if I do, I shall have to return at once to Palace Gardens. Henry says that when I am with you he will pay a visit to Frankfort, so you will be able to see him often, and I am perfectly certain that will be a great treat for us both. When my plans are completed, I will write again. Meanwhile, I am still your attached and unhappy niece,

'BERTA.'

CHAPTER XXXI.

A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

'Which way shall I fly
Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?
Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell;
And, in the lowest deep a lower deep,
Still threatening to devour me, opens wide,
To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven.'

MILTON.

MR. ARGOLL had never written a line to his brother till now. For this reason his brother was greatly surprised when he received the following note from him:

'DEAR HENRY,

'I shall be glad if you will call at Athelstane House to-morrow morning between

ten and eleven. I wish to talk with you about business. As you said the last time you called here that you hated to be kept waiting, I shall arrange for your being shown into my room the instant you arrive, provided you do so between the hours named. You need not be afraid of being asked to interpret again for your friend Signor Malero: I have done with him for the present.

'Yours truly,

'J. M. ARGOLL.'

'My friend Signor Malero, indeed!' was Mr. Henry Argoll's angry exclamation after reading this note. 'Why! he is the plague of my life. I wish I had never met him, or heard anything about his confounded Republic or its affairs. I have been well punished for going to Patagonia. And now I am asked to go to the City, which is nearly as detestable a place!'

Yet he went to the City, reaching Athelstane House between ten and eleven o'clock, and being at once ushered into his brother's room. He was curious to learn what his

brother had to say, and he was determined to let him know that he had resolved never to act as interpreter again, or take part in any business which concerned the Republic of Patagonia.

'I am glad to see you, Henry; you are punctual for once. Now don't be angry, and let me talk for a few minutes.'

This was Mr. Argoll's fraternal welcome. Mr. Henry Argoll replied, in his most unamiable fashion:

'I shall keep my temper, Joseph, and be patient, if you will refrain from saying unpleasant things. I know you have an absurd notion that only City men are punctual, and that artists and others either cannot afford watches or else never think of looking at them. I have protested against this before, and I repeat that if you make any more of your unpleasant speeches I shall leave the room.'

Mr. Argoll thought it discreet to take no notice of this outburst. It could not be denied that he always tried to say something which his brother would dislike to hear, and

he thought it his duty to do this to one whom he would persist in considering a scapegrace, because he had become an artist and entertained no respect for the City or City men. Perhaps it should be explained that Mr. Argoll considered himself to be about to display unexampled generosity. He was, or at least he plumed himself on being, an eminently just man, and he always took special pains to prevent anyone from complaining that he had not received what seemed to be fair treatment at his hands. It is true that he never did more than sufficed to let him affirm that he had acted handsomely, and he had now made up his mind to deal justly, as he thought, with his brother. He knew very well that, if his brother had chosen to introduce Signor Malero to any other firm of enterprising financiers, he would have been offered a large share in the profits as a matter of course, and he did not wish to be fairly chargeable with treating his brother worse than any other financier would have done.

Mr. Argoll had considerable difficulty in

estimating the share in the profits of the Patagonian loan which it would be right to offer his brother. He naturally shrank from giving him too much, and he was anxious to escape the charge of being stingy; his own profit was very large. If he had offered his brother ten thousand pounds he would not have been absurdly generous; if he had fixed the amount at twenty-five thousand, it would not have been impoverishing himself; and if he had even said: 'Here, Henry, is a cheque for fifty thousand pounds,' his brother would not have had a disproportionate share of the proceeds. Mr. Argoll decided to offer him five thousand pounds, and to make a nice little speech when he did so.

He made the speech, which ran as follows:

'You know, Henry, that when our father's property was divided, your share was ten and mine fifteen thousand pounds. This was in accordance with an arrangement over which neither of us had any control. I thought it rather unfair at the time, and that was the principal reason why I was so

anxious that you should put your portion into my hands in order that I might be able to let you have a larger income. You refused, much to my disappointment, and I have always thought that you did not appreciate my kindness. Now, please don't interrupt me. I know you are going to say that you objected to having anything to do with business, and that sort of thing; but let me finish. As you have really been most useful, and I may say kind, as regards this Patagonian loan, I think you ought to have a fair share in the profits which are commonly made out of such things, and I have drawn a cheque for five thousand pounds, which will thus make you exactly as rich as I was when I first began life.'

'Keep your cheque, Joseph; I don't want it,' said Mr. Henry Argoll rather brusquely. He continued, 'Since acting as an interpreter for Malero, I have learned how you people do business, and I must say it looks to me something very like . . . well, I won't use hard words, but I don't wish to touch your money.'

Mr. Argoll was not so angry with his brother as some might expect; had his brother taken the cheque and called him a robber, he would have fired up; as there was a pleasant prospect of not having to part with any money, he meekly bore the harsh words, replying in a conciliatory tone:

'Well, Henry, please yourself. I cannot force you to take the money; but if you do you are welcome to it, and I think you have fairly earned it. How long will you be painting pictures before you can earn such a sum?'

'If I could paint a picture which would fetch that amount I should be delighted; there is no shame in getting a reward for honest work, but I do not see any fun in humbugging the Patagonians and the English public simply for the purpose of filling your pockets.'

'I see, Henry,' continued Mr. Argoll, in the same placid mood, 'you do not understand finance or the common forms of business; if you did, you would not speak so foolishly.'

'Thank God, Joseph, I do not either understand or practise what you call financing. However, we need not dispute about that matter. You can keep your cheque and I shall preserve my ignorance. By the way, as I am here, I may say it will be no use sending messages to my rooms, as I am going abroad for some months. So good-bye!'

He was at the door when Mr. Argoll exclaimed:

'Wait a minute, Henry; I do not know if you have heard that there is to be a wedding in Palace Gardens soon.'

'What! a wedding!' said Henry, in great surprise, if not consternation, his blood running cold at the notion that Miss Solar had played him false, and was to be married to another. His brother observed and enjoyed his confusion; but he speedily and considerately reassured him by saying, in a mocking strain:

'No, no; the heiress is all right, and will wait patiently till she is twenty-five, which will be about seven years hence; you seem to

have turned my ward's head so that there is no likelihood of her marrying sooner. The bride is to be Ella, and Lord John is the happy man.'

Drawing a sigh of relief, the younger brother replied :

'I am very glad to hear it, Joseph. I have got to like Lord John ; he is a much better fellow than I had supposed, and Ella seems a nice girl, though rather too milk-and-water a one for my taste. If you are at a loss what to do with that cheque, hand it to her ; she and Lord John will not be over-burdened with money, but they will be none the worse for that.'

'And yet you have proposed to marry Berta, who certainly has got some money.'

'I wish she had not, Joseph ; and I hope for both our sakes it won't be much.'

'Have you any notion how much she will have some day ?'

'I have not, and do not care to know. Only I may tell you that Lord John seemed to know all about it, judging from what he would insist upon telling me, though I begged

him to change the subject. I should fancy she may have about one or two thousand a year when she comes of age, which is ample for anyone of common-sense. I suppose you have heard of Sheepshanks, who presented so fine a collection of pictures to the nation? Well, he had no more than fifteen hundred a year, and he lived at Rutland Gate. If he could collect these pictures, and live in good style as a bachelor on fifteen hundred pounds, any married couple should be able to do so, and present the nation with many children on two thousand.'

Whilst Mr. Argoll patiently listened to this, he said internally: 'I always thought you a fool, but now I am sure of it;' and then he repeated aloud:

'You may have thought me unkind, Henry, but I really objected to your marrying my ward simply because I was doubtful if you and she would hit it off. I don't want to make a bargain, but if you will do me a great favour, I may reconsider my decision.'

'If it has nothing to do with financing, which is a business I neither understand nor

like, I am ready to oblige you, Joseph. Only let me tell you that I don't appreciate your kindness so far as it has gone, and I think I can speak for Bertha also.'

'Bertha is too young and inexperienced to understand these matters, Henry; besides, I am sure you have no idea of my responsibility as far as she is concerned.'

'Perhaps I have not, Joseph; but I have a very lively notion of your capacity for making yourself disagreeable.'

'Now, Henry, give up saying savage things. They don't pay, let me tell you. Now listen to me.'

'I don't mind doing so, Joseph, when you give up doing unpleasant things. You forget that I am the sufferer, whilst you are having your own way—and a very bad one I think it.'

Had it not been that his great success in making much money, and in getting credit for having done much hypothetical good, had lately rendered Mr. Argoll more angelic in temper than was in accordance with his nature, there would have been an explosion

on his part, and the two brothers would have parted in a state of angry antagonism, which was nothing new. For once, however, and happily for himself perhaps, Mr. Argoll's angry passions did not rise and overpower him. He mastered his temper, and he had his brother at a disadvantage accordingly. His brother thought to himself, 'What can have come over Joseph? He seems to have taken a lesson out of the book of his namesake in the Old Testament when tempted in another way.' Then he said to his brother, in a temperate tone:

'Well, Joseph, if you have anything interesting to tell me, I shall listen without remark. I don't hesitate to admit that you mean well, even when your manner to me is most aggravating.'

Mr. Argoll was gratified with this implied avowal that his brother had been too hasty as well as unjust. Besides, a desire which had vaguely floated through his mind now took definite shape, and he did not wish to be balked in his purpose. He specially wished his brother to help him, and there-

fore he forced himself to appear amiable and forbearing. Self-interest acts as a powerful curb on a bad temper.

'I am about to tell you,' he began, 'something which occurred when I was in Sicily, and which I have not mentioned to a soul. I think you will sympathize with me. If you don't, please keep the story to yourself. I know I can trust you to do that.'

Mr. Argoll went on to give his brother a truer as well as fuller account of his adventures in Sicily than had appeared in the newspapers. He admitted to him how much ransom he had paid, and why he did so. He depicted Carlo Nerone as a blackguard of the worst kind. He told the story of Mr. Byker's death, without omitting to add how annoyed he felt on finding that Mr. Byker had two hundred pounds in circular notes of the London and Westminster Bank when he disappeared, yet characteristically concealing the further circumstance that, on giving an indemnity to the bank, he had been repaid the amount. He ended his story by saying:

'Now, Henry, I am a man of peace, as you know'—Henry knew nothing of the kind, beyond the fact that his brother would not fight when he was a boy, and was generally regarded as a coward—'and I think I may say that the chief object of my life has been to live in charity with all men.' Henry could not deny this, provided it meant that his brother carefully refrained from giving charity to any man.

Mr. Argoll pausing, his brother said :

'I am sorry to hear, Joseph, that you suffered and lost so much ; but I am chiefly vexed to hear of poor Byker's death. That rascal Nerone ought to suffer.'

'So I think, too,' said Mr. Argoll with emphasis. 'The question which puzzles me is how to get him punished as he deserves. Of course there is no hope of getting any of the money back, yet I should be pleased beyond measure to think the blackguard had been punished for robbing me. Besides, he had the audacity to hint that I was a brigand also ; that was nearly as bad as cheating me out of my money.'

'I suppose you left instructions in Sicily to proceed against him ?'

'No; I was too ill to be able to do anything when I was there, and to this day I cannot tell how I got from Catania to Naples.'

'Do you purpose doing anything now ?'

'When you told me a few minutes ago that you thought of going abroad for a time, it occurred to me that you might not object to go to Sicily and do your best to get Carlo Nerone sent to prison. I can give you introductions which will smooth matters, and I shouldn't mind paying a thousand pounds for a reward, if that was necessary. As you will not take this cheque, I think I can afford spending that sum. Besides, I will pay your expenses.'

'Well, Joseph, I don't mind trying what I can do. I have often wished to have a look at Sicily. As I have been spending little of late, I can easily afford to pay for myself, though I shall readily undertake to apply the thousand pounds you propose to offer as a reward.'

'That is settled, then. I can only say, if you succeed, Henry, I shall consider you have put me under an obligation for the first time in your life. Come and dine with us this evening. Lord John will be there, I suppose, but he will not care to talk with either of us. I must say I never saw a man so suddenly fall head-over-ears in love in my life. And now that we have arranged this matter, you may like to have a chat with Berta. I shan't mind your calling again at Palace Gardens as you used to do.'

The brothers parted till the evening. Mr. Henry Argoll drove to Palace Gardens, and went direct to Miss Solar's studio after entering the house. As he opened the door of the room he said, in response to her exclamation of surprise :

'Don't be frightened, Berta. I am here by leave of the higher powers. I have something to tell you.'

He repeated to her what his brother had told him. She was greatly interested, this being the first time her natural curiosity had been gratified.

She exclaimed, 'Poor Mr. Argoll! And did he actually pay ten thousand pounds to these brigands? No wonder he has been complaining about being badly off since then. The sum was an enormous one to lose.'

She thought so, because her notions about the value of money were rather vague, and also because she had not the slightest idea that the sum which seemed stupendous to her was much less than half her own income and one-twentieth of Mr. Argoll's. She was still more affected by the story of Mr. Byker's death and of the funeral service at the mouth of the *Inferno*. She moved her lover in turn by telling him the sad tale of old Mrs. Byker's end, saying as little as possible, however, of the kindly part which she had played. Indeed, this part of the story was so indistinctly narrated, as to lead Mr. Henry Argoll to suppose that the chief part in comforting poor Mrs. Byker had been played by his sister-in-law.

After they had talked over these matters he said:

'Now, Berta, I should like to go to Sicily

to try if I cannot bring this scoundrel to justice. I should like to punish him, even if in doing so I did not give my brother a sort of revenge. Do you object to my going?'

'No, Henry; go, by all means. If I were a man I would go with you; and if we were married I should certainly go. I don't wish you to run risks, and I am very sorry to part with you; but I should feel happier if something were done to the brigand who was the cause of poor Mr. Byker's death. If Mrs. Argoll were here, she would tell me that these are not Christian sentiments, but I cannot help that.' Miss Solar did not misrepresent Mrs. Argoll. Yet unchristian sentiments are not always unnatural.

'You are a noble girl, Berta, was Mr. Henry Argoll's exclamation, which he accentuated in a manner that needs no explanation. So the younger brother started for Sicily on an errand of vengeance.

Mr. Henry Argoll took an introduction to Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc in Paris, who gave him letters to Messrs. Palmaro and

Vilani in Catania. He had one to the English ambassador at the Italian Court, who stated the case to the Italian authorities, and they agreed that a company of soldiers should be sent to Sicily with orders to capture Carlo Nerone. Mr. Henry Argoll had to spend a few days in Rome whilst these arrangements were making—Government officials in Rome, as in younger cities, conducting themselves in a methodical and exasperating fashion. He was not gratified by revisiting Rome after the lapse of twenty years. His feelings may be best understood from the following short letter, which he sent to Miss Solar:

'DEAREST BERTA,

'I have been well received here by our ambassador, and introduced by him to the Minister of Justice and the Minister of War, both of whom agreed to do their utmost to put down brigandage in Sicily. They were greatly impressed when they were told that my brother had been a victim. "What!" they both said in substance, "can the senior partner in the great house of

Argoll and Solar have been subjected to such indignities? Why, Mr. Argoll has been one of Italy's best friends when loans have been issued!" So you see a financier does inspire some people with gratitude; probably they may wish to keep on good terms with him, so as to receive future favours.

'You did not stay long enough in Rome to see it properly when you stopped on your way to and from Naples. Can you believe that I wish I had not revisited it? The city may be changed for the better; but it is not the old Rome which I knew. In my day there was no Via Nazionale, and the Café Greco, where the artists meet, has quite a different look. Many persons say that Rome has been greatly improved; certainly it is completely changed, but I do not think so much of the improvement as those persons who like everything to look as if it had been built last week and painted yesterday.

'When I entered my studio, after returning from Patagonia, I found that my servant had employed her idle hands in

putting things to rights, as she called it. Everything was put into its proper place; there were no more dusty corners, and order reigned supreme. Yet I thought the studio most uncomfortable. I had grown to like the dust and enjoy the disorder, and to know where to put my hands on everything when they were not in their proper places. It is with a similar feeling that I regard Rome. I wish it had not been swept and garnished, and made to look almost as modern and monotonous as a Western city in America. From what you told me, I do not fancy that Naples will be spoilt in the same way, and that I may still find it noisy, dirty, and picturesque, and in all respects an almost perfect hotbed for beggars and the cholera. But I shall not stay there, as I wish to proceed as quickly as possible to Catania. When Carlo Nerone is caught, I will send you a lock of his hair. It may interest your generous guardian. He will then think the better of

'Your loving

'HENRY.'

On reaching Catania, Mr. Henry Argoll found the company of soldiers there, and prepared to proceed to Nicata. Messrs. Palmaro and Vilani were most attentive to him. They were pleased in their own interests to find that a vigorous blow at brigandage was impending, and they gave Mr. Henry Argoll their advice and assistance with great readiness and genuine satisfaction. He was so much struck with the city that he would have resolved to linger there and see its antiquities, had he not been informed that, if anything effectual were to be accomplished, no time should be lost. The soldiers were impatient to go forward. They were to receive a lira a day extra pay as soon as they reached the enemy, or in other words, were at the headquarters of the brigands. After leaving Catania he pressed forward, and after a fatiguing journey he reached Nicata, and took up his abode at the *Hôtel des Étrangers.*

Only one incident occurred during the journey thither. Almost at the very turning in the road where Mr. Argoll's huge medicine-chest fell off the back of the

carriage, a woman with a child in her arms was standing at the top of the slope on the left-hand side. The horses were dragging the carriage slowly up the steep and stony path, which resembled a dry watercourse more than a road. Just at the corner where a jerk had caused the chest to tumble off, the child gave a leap from its mother's arms and rolled down the slope upon the roadway. With a loud scream the mother rushed after it. Yet before the child had been touched by the fore-feet of the horses, Mr. Henry Argoll, who had watched the incident, sprang out of the carriage, took the child in his arms, and handed it unharmed to the almost frantic mother. She could scarcely find any other words to thank him than invocations to every saint in the calendar to reward him for his brave and kindly act. He simply said in Italian :

'The child is not hurt, I hope?'

'No, the saints be praised!' she replied; and added, 'may heaven reward you, signore, for I cannot;' and then she turned away.

A more wretched fortnight than that which Mr. Henry Argoll passed in the *Hôtel des Étrangers* at Nicata he had not known even in Patagonia. He was not merely uncomfortable—that would not have caused him to complain; but he was wearied to death with doing nothing useful and seeing nothing done. No tidings of Carlo Nerone could be obtained; he seemed to have disappeared, and yet no one could tell in what direction. Morning after morning the rugged country was scoured by the soldiers, whom Mr. Henry Argoll accompanied. None of the inhabitants had seen or heard of him. No resistance was offered. The peasants professed themselves ready to aid the soldiers, but their help was in words which were not translated into deeds. Each had much difficulty in making the other understand what was said. They were all subjects of the Italian crown, yet they were as much separated in speech and ideas as if they were natives of countries which had no connection with each other. The soldiers were all North Italians. They had no sympathy with brigands, and no affection for

Sicilians. The Sicilians spoke of them as foreigners.

There was no lack of industry and ardour on the part of the soldiers. They had been told that the reward would be divided amongst them in the event of Carlo being captured alive. More than one peasant would have been shot had not this been clearly understood. Many a peasant was chased under the supposition that he was the brigand chief. If each soldier had not been afraid to lose his share of the reward, he would have shot every person who seemed to bear a close resemblance to Carlo Nerone.

Mr. Henry Argoll grew tired of a never-ending chase after a man of whom there was no trace. He began to doubt whether such a man as Carlo Nerone had ever lived at Catania, and whether his brother did not labour under a hallucination; he was unaware that the poorest peasant would not have betrayed Carlo to save his own life. The loyalty of these peasants to him was as genuine as that of the poor Highlanders to the Pretender.

Each of them was his friend or admirer. Even those upon whom he had levied ransom did not wish him to fall into the hands of the foreign soldiers. If southern troops had been employed, Carlo's life might have been in greater danger. These soldiers would, perhaps, have come to an understanding with the peasants to divide the reward; after catching him and obtaining it, they might have connived at his escape. At the end of a fortnight Mr. Henry Argoll said to the officer commanding the company:

'It is no use, Captain, my staying here any longer. I shall leave in three days' time unless Carlo is captured. I am not authorized to distribute any part of the reward unless he should be captured, and let me impress upon you again to have him taken alive. You had better repeat this to your men, and then they will know what to expect.'

Two out of the three days had expired, and, though the soldiers strained every nerve to get hold of the brigand, they still failed. They took nearly every inhabitant of the village into custody who seemed a suspicious

person ; but as a clerk in Messrs. Palmaro and Vilani's bank, who knew Carlo Nerone by sight and had been brought for the purpose of identifying him, declared in each case that a mistake had been made, the prisoner was instantly set free.

On the morning of the third and last day Mr. Henry Argoll rose early, as was his custom, in order to write his Diary, and to sketch before breakfast. This was his only quiet period of the day. Later he was worried by false reports and alarms. He occupied the room in which Mr. Byker had spent several days whilst his master was suffering with fever in the garret. The window opened on a patch of ground at the back of the hotel, which was called the garden ; but which contained as many blocks of lava as thorny plants and flowering shrubs. As the weather in early spring was as warm there as in England during August, the window remained open night and day. Whilst seated at a table with his back to the window, Mr. Henry Argoll was startled to hear a voice say 'Good-morning, sir,' in fair English, and

with a very slight Italian accent. Turning round, he saw a man before him who resembled an inhabitant of the village, and who stood hat in hand awaiting his notice and reply.

'Good-morning,' Mr. Henry Argoll said in turn; and added, 'what brings you here, and who are you?'

'I am Carlo Nerone, at your service,' was the answer.

Mr. Henry Argoll was not wanting in pluck or nerve, but he was thunderstruck for the moment; the other went on without waiting for him to speak, and said:

'You need not be afraid. I don't think you are; at least you don't look so. I have two loaded revolvers and a large knife here, and if I wished to kill you, I should not have given you warning, but have attacked you when you were seated with your back to the window, and did not hear my approach.'

'But what do you want, and why do you come now?' Mr. Henry Argoll naturally asked.

'Listen to me for a few minutes, sir, and

I will tell you ; only you must promise not to call out. I know there are soldiers outside who would come the moment you gave the signal, and I know also that you can do so in Italian. But it is enough for you to give your word. I don't really like English people, and if I ever said I did it was to flatter them, but I think I can trust you.'

'I shall not betray you whilst you are in this room; but I can only promise that you will be undisturbed for half an hour. My coffee will be brought then. If you prefer to speak Italian, though your English is excellent, you may do so, as I understand it.'

Carlo Nerone did prefer the speech in which he was not more fluent, but in which he felt more at home, and he poured forth a tale of his experiences which greatly interested and impressed Mr. Henry Argoll. He narrated simply and truthfully Mr. Argoll's visit and Mr. Byker's death, and his tale commended itself to his listener, even though it differed in some material particulars from that which his brother had communicated to him. He was relieved to hear that Mr.

Byker's death was purely accidental, and he felt half ashamed of his mission. Why should he be the instrument for sending Carlo Nerone to imprisonment for life, which is the fate of murderers in Italy? The man did not seem so bad after all, and he did not appear to be a much worse robber than his brother, the esteemed and powerful financier.

'But what can I do for you, Signor Nerone?' he asked; adding, 'in a few minutes' time some one will be here with my coffee, and if you are in the room the chances will be against you, even if I hold my tongue.'

Carlo replied, in tones which went to Mr. Henry Argoll's heart:

'I have met many Englishmen, some of whom were good and stupid, like Mr. Byker, others who were cunning and venomous, like your brother; but I have never met one before who was a good soul, and who was more like one of ourselves than one of your countrymen.'

'Now, Signor Nerone,' said Mr. Henry Argoll, 'stop your flattery; it will do you more harm than good.'

'I did not mean to flatter you, sir—indeed I did not; and let me tell you, in order to prove it, that if I had chosen, you would never have seen your country again. I could have killed you like a dog, or got some of my followers to do so, if I had pleased. But I have spared your life because you saved the life of my little boy Enrico.'

Tears which were not forced rolled down the brigand's cheeks as he said this. Mr. Henry Argoll was moved also; but he could not understand what Carlo meant, and he asked him, after a moment's pause, to explain himself.

'Perhaps you have forgotten snatching a little child from under the horses' feet when you were on your way here. That was my darling Enrico, my only child. For doing that, sir, not a hair of your head would be harmed by me, or anyone I can command.'

Mr. Henry Argoll had forgotten the circumstance till it was now recalled to his memory. He merely said:

'Pray do not exaggerate what I did. I should have done the same for anyone.'

'But perhaps other persons might not have a brigand's gratitude, and hence it is that I have spared your life when I could easily have taken it. If you knew all that I could tell you, it is possible that you might not think me much worse than many others. I should not have induced your brother to pay so large a ransom if I had not had a dream of beginning brigandage in modern style, which consists in robbing the public in a less direct way than was understood and practised by my ancestors. But this dream is at an end. I must be a brigand of the old school, such as was the rule when my ancestors, as I have heard it said, looked upon the Athenians who were prisoners in the quarries of Syracuse, and when the old families of which your brother talked to me were never heard of. My present plan is to join a band in Calabria, of which the venerable Bardolo was the head. I heard of his death the other day. I think that I can teach his son something, and I wish to leave this place, which is not what it used to be before schools were common in the island.'

Mr. Henry Argoll listened patiently to this long speech. At its close he asked:

'How, then, can I help you, Signor Nerone? I suppose you are in earnest? But my brother will not believe me if I should repeat your story to him when I am back in London.'

'But he will believe this,' holding up a small packet. 'This contains half his ransom; the other half I shall keep, or, rather, a part of it, because I have had to give a good deal away. The rest I have given to my wife to put aside for our little boy, in case he should not be able to follow my career, which seems to be an unfortunate one, though it has attractions which you cannot understand.'

Mr. Henry Argoll took the packet, offered his hand to Carlo, and said:

'I am really sorry for you, Signor Nerone, and you may rely upon my going off to-night and taking the soldiers with me. But I advise you for your own sake to go away also. The police are ordered to keep a watch over this place such as they have never kept before.'

Carlo simply said, 'Thank you, sir,' and with a grace which no Englishman of his condition could imitate, he kissed Mr. Henry Argoll's hand, adding, 'If ever I can repay you in any way, you will not ask me once in vain.'

There was a noise at the door, as of some one entering, and Carlo rushed out at the open window. A soldier was watching there; another, who had overheard voices, entered the room, and he, too, ran after the brigand, who disappeared round the corner of the house. Mr. Henry Argoll called out to them in Italian, 'Stop! it is a friend.' The soldiers repeated the cry of 'Stop!' but Carlo did not heed it. He knew every inch and turning of the path, and he was determined to get away from the soldiers, who, stimulated by the prospect of capturing the brigand at the last moment, and gaining the reward, appeared on all sides. It was in vain that Mr. Henry Argoll called out to them to stop; they were resolved to approach the flying man and ascertain who he was; they thought he might really be the chief of the brigands.

Carlo distanced his pursuers, and ran towards the *Inferno*. His intention was to turn aside by the narrow and difficult path leading towards the church, which Mr. Byker wished to follow, but failed to find. As Carlo turned sharply towards it, a soldier confronted him; Carlo fired his revolver, which he carried in his right hand, but missed the soldier; the latter fired his rifle and disabled Carlo's right arm. He turned quickly round, with the intention of finding a means of escape on the opposite side; but the ledge was narrow; he felt faint owing to the shock and the blood streaming from the wound in his arm; his foot slipped, and as it did so he gave a shriek of anguish which rang through the air, and thrilled everyone who heard it. Carlo rolled rapidly down into the *Inferno*, and was seen no more.

CHAPTER XXXII.

KNOTS UNTIED.

'La philosophie triomphe aisément des maux passés et des maux à venir, mais les maux présents triomphent d'elle.'—La Rochefoucauld.

'Whate'er he did was done with so much ease,
In him alone 'twas natural to please.'

Dryden.

MR. ARGOLL seldom spoke at his breakfast-table. He had no inclination to make himself agreeable. His mind was fully occupied with schemes for circumventing a rival during the day. Besides, he was busily engaged in swallowing his breakfast, and the contents of *The Morning Paper*. He first read the City article, and then the telegrams from abroad.

The other contents of the paper, more especially the comprehensive and exhaustive leading articles, he reserved for careful reading in the evening.

Greatly to the surprise of the others at the table, Mr. Argoll exclaimed one morning:

'How extraordinary! I never heard of anything like this before;' and then he read aloud a long telegram headed, '*Eruption of Mount Etna.*' Mr. Argoll was not aware that the event which surprised him took place on the evening of the day upon which Mr. Henry Argoll saw the last of Carlo Nerone.

The telegram was from the Naples correspondent of *The Morning Paper*, where it may be read in full. A summary of it may suffice for the present. After explaining how he had learned that Mount Etna was in a state of activity, and that the eruption promised to be on the largest scale known this century, the correspondent added that he had lost no time in visiting Sicily, and that 'The spectacle was one of extraordinary grandeur. I first beheld it from the sea.

A lurid light was reflected from the vast mass of molten lava. At intervals the jets, or rather pillars, of fire from the crater ceased, and it seemed as if a black column had taken their place and was ascending into the air. This was a dense body of smoke and ashes; then the crests of flame gained the ascendency again, and the lava torrent began to roll down the mountain-side. The fiery mass sometimes made its way by fits and starts, pausing for five or ten minutes, and then resuming its destructive career by leaps and bounds. At Catania I could not obtain full and trustworthy details of what had happened, so I pushed on to Nicolosi, which is the place nearest to the torrent of lava, and where the inhabitants are trembling for the issue. Immediately after the great explosion which announced that the mountain was becoming active, there was a heavy fall of fine ash in Nicolosi, and if this had lasted a few minutes longer most of the people would have been suffocated. When I reached the place, the air was heavy as well as hot, and I breathed with difficulty.

Fugitives from the mountain villages have fled here for their lives. A few soldiers, forming part of the expedition sent after a notorious brigand named Carlo Nerone, have arrived from Nicata, a mountain village which is well known to English travellers in Sicily, but the soldiers cannot tell whether the rest of their comrades have escaped. They fear that everybody who was in the village except themselves have lost their lives. It seems that simultaneously with the first and loudest explosion there was an outburst at an opening near Nicata, which is locally known as the *Inferno,* and in which many persons have perished when trying to ascend the mountain without a guide. The ashes and stones ejected from this dangerous fissure in the mountain-side overwhelmed the greater part of Nicata before the torrent of lava reached it. The fiery flood has approached to within a thousand yards of this place, but its progress appears to be arrested. Indeed, the general belief seems to be that the worst is over. Nothing authentic is known about the loss of life; it must be very large, whilst the destruc-

tion to property is incalculable. The lava flood has covered and desolated a tract extending over five miles.'

When Mr. Argoll had finished reading, he exclaimed, with an unwonted show of feeling: 'Poor Henry! there is no news from him;' then, recovering himself from this partial access of human weakness, he continued: 'To be sure, he is not given to act in a business-like way. He will probably have written instead of telegraphing to say that he has escaped. We shall doubtless hear from him to-morrow or next day at the farthest.' Having done his duty as a brother by making this reflection, Mr. Argoll went off to Athelstane House in his usual self-satisfied frame of mind.

That day he had more interesting things to occupy his attention than the condition of Nicata and the fate of his brother. A vacancy in the representation of the City had suddenly occurred. Many persons were ready to fill it; but the prevailing opinion was that if Mr. Argoll would consent to become a candidate he would be returned without

opposition. He was regarded as just the man for the City. His popularity had increased as his means for distributing favours had multiplied. Of late he had been lavish in giving members of the Stock Exchange, and other persons who go to the City to make money, and whose views represent public opinion there, special opportunities for adding largely to their wealth.

A requisition inviting him to become a candidate had been signed by those persons who knew him intimately, and by others who, knowing nothing of him except by report, were satisfied that he was both a fit and proper person, not only to represent the City in Parliament, but also to enter the Ministry and display himself as a heaven-sent Chancellor of the Exchequer. A man who has made his own fortune in the City is supposed to be well fitted to make the country's fortune, though history and experience show that the most successful custodians of the nation's purse have never, from William Pitt to Mr. Gladstone, been engaged in business, and have always been free from the

failings and blindness of those who have had a commercial training. Yet practical men always command a respect in City circles which is not readily accorded to theorists, however eminent. The former are the persons of whom Bulwer Lytton wrote, in his *England and the English*, that, 'When they say that they are plain practical men, I know they are going, by the fact that one and one make two, to prove the theory that two and two make seven.'

Neither general considerations of a rational kind, nor a knowledge of English history, had any influence over Mr. Argoll's City friends and admirers. His City virtues were having their reward. Those who knew him best and admired him the most were appreciating him at what they considered to be his true value. He was as happy and satisfied as a cat which is gently stroked the right way. Perhaps he was not sufficiently grateful for his mercies, being rather too disposed to accept them as matters of course.

Mr. Argoll considered as his due all the honours and fine speeches of which he was the recipient. He had not laboured at Athel-

stane House in vain, and the struggles of many years were gradually being recompensed in the way which he deemed proper. Money he had acquired; now, he was thirsting for fame. Whilst gaining a fortune he had never dreamt that he ought to obtain anything else. A large fortune having been won—a fortune, too, which he felt could be increased, without risk or labour, almost beyond the limits of his sanguine thoughts in early youth—he grew ambitious of that social distinction which gilds the life of a millionaire. So far everything had gone well with him, and he thought himself created for obtaining anything upon which he set his heart. He laughed at his old desire to become a landowner and a count in Sicily. There was no reason, he said to himself, why he should not become a peer of Great Britain. He was convinced that his virtues and wealth qualified him for upholding the peerage and adorning the hereditary chamber.

To enter Parliament as a member for the City of London was the first step towards taking his seat in the House of Lords.

When the requisition was handed to him on the day that he read the telegram in *The Morning Paper*, he returned an immediate reply to the effect that he would cheerfully sacrifice himself in order to serve his fellow-citizens. He added that the pride and purpose of his career as their representative would be to foster and maintain all the institutions of the country, and to act as a pillar of the State. His self-denying and patriotic sentiments gave general satisfaction. He was elected in due course, and the City of London was congratulated upon having sent another pattern representative to the Grand Council of the Nation.

On returning home in the evening, he found his household in a state of gloom, which the news that he would shortly be returned to Parliament did not completely dispel. It is true that his wife was delighted. She entertained an exaggerated notion of the honour which would accrue to herself as the wife of a member of Parliament. Miss Solar did not take any interest in the matter. Her thoughts were concentrated upon the

and since passing through Catania on his way to Nicata.

'Ah! this is a bad business!' was his ejaculation. In his frame of mind at the moment, he would have readily given a few pounds to save his brother's life.

All that day the gloom deepened over the Argoll household. The Angel of Death seemed to be hovering over it. Everyone spoke in whispers. All the women were in tears. Something like remorse agitated Mr. Argoll when he saw his ward bearing up against the blow which he feared had blighted her life. Of course, he had acted for the best; he had done so all his days; he gloried in always doing what was right, and he could defy anyone to prove that he was chargeable with open wickedness. He had usually been too careful of appearances to commit a glaring and unmistakable fault. Besides, he had the supreme satisfaction of feeling that whatever he did, even if obnoxious and painful to others, was performed on strictly Christian or business principles.

No letter arrived on the morning of the

third day, and now the last vestige of hope had disappeared. At last Mr. Argoll tried to speak words of comfort to his ward, even though he did not believe that his brother was alive. Yet he thought it right to do what he could to make amends for his harsh conduct. She did not repulse him, even though she felt that he was trying to delude her with vain hopes. She was placid and resigned. Her grief was none the less intense because it was subdued. She could suffer in silence, yet the strain of her endurance would be the more terrible in its results. In her case, as in that of Calantha in Ford's tragedy, *The Broken Heart*, it might be said:

'They are the silent griefs which cut the heart-strings.'

Mrs. Argoll and Miss Tacon strove in all sincerity to console Miss Solar. She begged of them, however, to leave her to weep and suffer alone.

Mr. Argoll went to Athelstane House that day less disposed to transact business than he had ever been since he first entered

it. He did not greatly care whether Consols were firm or falling, whether stocks and shares were calm or agitated. His thoughts had been diverted from their ordinary channel, yet, having made several appointments, he had to receive the persons who called, and he strove to impose upon them with his usual skill. Still he was not quite himself, and he narrowly escaped entering into a transaction from which he would not have gained any profit, when a clerk brought him a message which gave him an excuse for asking the stockbroker who was in the room to call again later in the day. The message was to the effect that Mr. Henry wished to see him.

'Mr. Who?' he asked with more than his wonted acerbity of manner.

'Your brother, sir,' was the clerk's reply.

'Then show him in directly,' he said. The stockbroker left at once, Mr. Henry Argoll walking into the room as he passed out. 'Glad to see you back, Henry,' was Mr. Argoll's greeting. 'This is an unexpected visit. Why did you not write or wire, saying you would call?'

Mr. Argoll really felt more than conventionally glad that his brother had returned; but he kept his emotions well in hand, or, perhaps, being never overpowered by them, he easily remained quite cool. His brother sat down in the chair which the stockbroker had vacated, being the only one in the room upon which any person could venture to sit without fear of its falling or breaking down. Mr. Argoll began to write, whilst his brother watched and waited. The few lines which he wrote and put into an envelope did not occupy him many minutes. As soon as the envelope was closed and addressed, Mr. Argoll rang the bell, and told his clerk to give the letter to the messenger with an order to go off at once and deliver it. The short note was addressed to his wife, and ran thus:

'Henry has arrived; he seems well, and will probably be with you at luncheon.'

Mr. Henry Argoll was usually restless and impatient; and when visiting the City on business, he was always anxious to despatch

it and depart. At present he made no sign of being annoyed or flurried, neither did he get up, as he had done on previous occasions, and leave the room out of a feeling of vexation at not being attended to. As soon as Mr. Argoll had given the letter and a message to the clerk, his brother returned his greeting, and said:

'I do not wish to trouble you, Joseph, or hinder you for a moment from making money; but I wish to get rid of this packet, and then I shall go away with pleasure.'

'But when did you arrive, Henry, and where were you last?'

'I arrived this morning, and I have travelled without stopping from Nicata. I wish I had never gone there. It is a detestable hole.'

'I quite agree with you. I wish, too, that I had never seen it. Thank Heaven, neither of us will ever see it again!'

'I should think not. At least, I have no intention of returning there.'

'Don't you know that the place is destroyed?'

'It was not when I left. Only it may comfort you to hear that Carlo Nerone will never rob anyone again.'

'I should think not, indeed! At any rate, he will not do so at Nicata, as there is no such place left.'

'What do you mean by no such place being left? It was all right when I was there a few days ago, though Carlo will never entrap anyone again at the *Hôtel des Étrangers*.'

'That I quite believe, as there is neither an hotel nor any other house there. Haven't you heard of the eruption?'

'You mean the *Inferno*, I suppose? I saw it in full swing when Carlo went down.'

'No; I mean the eruption of Mount Etna, of which I read a full account in *The Morning Paper*.'

'I seldom read the papers at home, Joseph, and I never look at them when I'm abroad; so I don't know what eruption you refer to.'

'Why, Henry! we thought that you had felt as well as seen the eruption. Nicata is covered with lava, and most of the industrious inhabitants are smothered.'

'How and when did all this happen, Joseph? Judging from what you say, the world seems turned upside down during the few days that I have been travelling homewards at full speed.'

'What happened, Henry, was a sudden outburst of Mount Etna, of which I read an account in *The Morning Paper* about the beginning of this week. Let me think for a moment. This is Saturday. I read it in Tuesday's paper, so it must have taken place last Monday evening.'

'Well, Joseph, I left on Monday morning about ten o'clock, after seeing the last of Carlo Nerone at seven, and handing the reward of twenty-five thousand lire to the officer in command of the soldiers. I got a mule, rode to Catania, and reached that place just in time to catch the steamer for Naples. I went down below and slept nearly the whole time of the passage, as I was very tired. I took the first train from Naples, and I have come on here without stopping longer than was necessary to change from one train to another. I travelled so quickly because I wanted to

hand you this packet which I got from Carlo shortly before he disappeared down the *Inferno*. I have not opened it. He told me it contains half the ransom which you paid him.'

Mr. Argoll was too much astonished to say a word. He was slightly sceptical about any money being in the packet. On opening it, he was still more astonished to find that it contained a bundle of Italian bank-notes. He counted them carefully and slowly, and found that they represented five thousand pounds in English money.

'And you got all this out of that ruffian Carlo, did you?'

'Of course I did, Joseph, otherwise you would not have the packet now.'

'Well then, Henry, I can only say that you are the cleverest fellow I have ever met with.' He paused till he had re-counted the notes and found that he had not made any mistake, and then he added: 'Forgive me, my boy, if I have ever said any unkind things to you. I understand now that you know how to deal with rascals better than anyone

I ever heard of. Oh! why did you not join me here instead of wasting your time in painting pictures? What a heap of money we should have made together!'

Mr. Henry Argoll heard with indifference the compliment to his cleverness and sagacity as a detective, nor did he regret that he had chosen the thorny but honourable path which leads to the Temple of Fame in preference to the far easier one which ends in the Cave of Mammon.

Always prudent and thoughtful, Mr. Argoll had rung the bell and said to a clerk:

'Take these notes to Mr. Bandol, and tell him to see that they are cashed at once, and at the highest rate of exchange he can get, and to place the proceeds to my account at the bank.' Turning to his brother, he continued: 'I always like to make sure of these things, to prevent mistakes. The notes might be forgeries. However, if the money is got for them, it will be handed over to you; I will draw a cheque the instant after Mr. Bandol reports that the sum is paid into the bank.'

'Don't concern yourself about that, Joseph. I hope the notes are good ones, for your sake. I got the money entirely on your account. Do you often offer persons from the West-End cheques for five thousand pounds? for if you do, I can send plenty of persons here! But I must refuse your offer to day, as I did the last time you made a similar one.'

'What an extraordinary fellow you are, Henry! I have never been able to make you out. One would think, to hear you talk, that you cared nothing for money, and were ignorant of its value.'

'What you don't understand, Joseph, is very simple after all. I have never had too much money. If I had, I should be less indifferent to it. But I have always had enough to go on with, and if I had a desire to get more, it would be as an artist, and then what I earned would show that I had done honest work.'

'Then you won't object to take payment for a picture?'

'Of course not. The greatest of the Old

Masters was not dishonoured by being paid by a patron, but no artist who respects himself will accept anything which he has not fairly earned.'

'Did you ever paint a portrait, Henry?'

'Yes; I have painted several, and if my heart had not been set on landscape-painting, I should have made money in that way. My harshest critics praised my portraits, though they may have done so because they were not capable of appreciating my landscapes.'

'As you have not read the papers lately, you may not know that I am going to be elected a member for the City. Now, my friends have suggested that I should have my portrait painted and presented to the City Carlton Club. I rather think they wish me to pay for it. At any rate, there is no talk of a subscription being raised. Now, I cannot quite make up my mind what to do; but I think I shouldn't object to sit if you will paint it. You may find it good practice.'

Mr. Henry Argoll did not reply immediately. He had no hesitation about paint-

ing his brother's portrait; indeed, he had a lurking wish to show his brother what he could do as an artist, but he was not disposed to encourage his brother's meanness by making him a present of the portrait. He thought that he had better put an end to the project by saying he must be paid, and then naming a prohibitive price. So he said:

'You know, Joseph, or, if you don't, I may as well tell you, that Sir John, who is the fashionable painter, will not accept less than a thousand guineas for a portrait; and though I am glad to say that I am not a fashionable painter, I won't take less.'

'You have often told me, Henry, that I know nothing about art and artists, so you may be good enough to enlighten me on one thing. Is it the case that the higher the price paid for a picture the more the public admire it?'

'Yes; that is quite true, and it shows what geese the public are.'

'You may be right about the public being geese, though you are not very complimentary; yet there must be something in

what you say, as I remember my wife raving about some picture at the Academy which had been painted on commission for a higher price than had been given since the Academy was founded. I half thought of going to see the wonderful picture myself, only I have no time to waste in looking at pictures.'

'Except on bank-notes,' added his brother, with something not unlike a sneer.

'And very good pictures they are, too, let me tell you, Henry. They are much better worth having than your works of art.'

'Well, Joseph, I am sorry to confess the public do like pictures best which cost high prices. I once made that craze the subject of a paper in *The Weekly Rasper*. I proved that art in England is more a question of money than of genius.'

'To return to what I said about money. On second thoughts I think that I should deduct the reward of a thousand pounds from the sum you have brought back, and which you have squeezed out of Carlo Nerone in some unaccountable way. Now you are justly entitled to the four thousand. I shall

not miss it, as I had written off the whole ten thousand pounds as a bad debt, and never expected to see a penny of it again. If you won't take the four thousand as a gift, will you take them as payment for painting my portrait? I should think that when the portrait is exhibited, and it is known that it was painted on commission for four thousand pounds, you will get praise enough. Your other artist friends are sure to envy you, and that, I suppose, will be a satisfaction.'

The offer was wonderful and tempting. There would, indeed, be a sensation in the world of art if it were announced that Mr. Henry Argoll had received four thousand pounds for painting a portrait. Artists are not insensible to the money value of their works; indeed, they never think they can be appraised too highly. Sir Joshua and Turner are not the only great English artists who have driven hard bargains with their patrons, and have shown as much fondness as Mr. Argoll for hoarding money. The matter was settled between the brothers by Mr. Henry Argoll saying:

'Well, Joseph, if you insist upon it, I will

paint your portrait for the sum you mention. I have no doubt the public will appreciate the work when they hear the price. The critics are sure to praise you, so you will have the satisfaction of being likened to a Pope of Rome or a Grand Duke of Florence, who fostered artistic merit and understood the value of artists. I know their ways so well that I can anticipate almost the very words they will use. I only hope they won't praise me; for if they do, I shall think that I have disgraced myself.'

Mr. Henry Argoll reached Palace Gardens shortly before the hour of luncheon. The footman who opened the door gave a start at the sight of him. It was not yet known throughout the household that he had returned from Sicily. He was a favourite with the servants, partly because he was so unlike his brother, and partly because he had always a kind word for them and took an interest in their affairs.

'Very glad to see you back, sir,' was the footman's remark, to which he replied:

'I am very glad too, John. I have had a tiresome journey.'

'It's a good thing it was no worse, sir.'

Mrs. Argoll and Miss Tacon had the delicacy to keep away from the drawing-room. When Mr. Henry Argoll entered it, he was met half-way across the floor by Miss Solar, who clasped him round the neck, and, for the first time since she had known him, she could not speak for the emotion which choked her utterance; when she found her voice, she said:

'Oh, Henry, why did you not write? We had almost given you up. I am so glad you have come back,' and she emphasized these simple but heartfelt words in a way which is not permitted to a man and woman till they are engaged, and which is not constantly practised, when they may do it without hindrance, after they are married.

A few sentences from Mr. Henry Argoll sufficed to satisfy Miss Solar; she was so gratified to see him return, as it were, from the dead, that she was not exacting or indisposed to accept his explanation. Of course he would have telegraphed if he had known what his silence implied; but as he had only

heard of the final catastrophe at Nicata after arriving in London, he might be excused for not having sent a telegram or written a letter. Besides, on reckoning up the time which a letter would have taken to come, it was found that Mr. Argoll had miscalculated, and that it was a mistake to have expected one a day before his appearance in person. This was consolatory. She insisted upon a promise that he would never again go away alone on such an errand. He was not only ready to give the promise, but to add that he would never think of going away with anyone but herself.

'Oh! if that were only possible, how happy should I be!' was her fervent exclamation.

'So should I,' was his response, and then the expression of further lamentations or hopes was stopped by the gong sounding for luncheon.

He had a cordial welcome from Mr. Argoll and Miss Tacon, as well as from Lord John, who had become a standing dish at luncheon and dinner. They all regarded him with renewed respect. His journey

seemed to them a sort of marvel, and when he narrated his experience, they listened with intense interest. At the close of the story Lord John expressed the feelings of others besides himself when he remarked :

'Well, old fellow, that Carlo Nerone was not so bad after all. If being a member of a very ancient family be as great an advantage as your sister-in-law thinks, then he was as good as any of us.'

Miss Solar was otherwise affected, as her remark evinces :

'And you saved the little child's life, did you? What a brave man you are!'

'Now, don't say that, please; anyone else would have done the same thing.'

Miss Solar thought that Mr. Argoll would have seen the child crushed before his eyes without stretching out a hand to save it; but she kept this reflection to herself. She would not for the world have given Mrs. Argoll pain by saying it aloud. Mr. Henry Argoll went on to say :

'I don't mind admitting that I rather liked the people at Nicata. They seemed

very ignorant, but many ignorant people are quite as estimable as others who have gone to school and learned everything but how to be agreeable. As for Carlo Nerone, I think that he was to be pitied. He was not a bad fellow at heart; and I am sure he really did his utmost to save poor Byker's life, and that my brother is quite wrong in thinking that he had planned to kill him.'

'But, then,' said Mrs. Argoll, 'if Mr. Byker had not died, my husband might have been sent down that horrible place—I forget its name, so on the whole it is best as it is. I don't like brigands, and I am not sorry that Carlo is dead.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

'All's well that ends well.'

'Look on this picture and on this.'

SHAKESPEARE.

MARRIAGES which are approved in Heaven often involve much worry before they are celebrated upon earth. That a man and woman should agree to be joined in wedlock is neither infrequent nor unnatural. Many reasons might be urged in such a case against undue delay. But difficulties may exist or arise which logic cannot remove. The tyranny of custom is sometimes stronger than that tyranny which Aristotle styles the greatest of all tyrannies—the tyranny of a multitude of tyrants.

Two paupers find no impediment to their marriage, though the results of their union may be undesirable. But when the pair who wish to be made one flesh and happy have money or expectations, then a number of artificial reasons arise why everything should be done slowly, so that everything should be in order. Bacon wrote that he knew a wise man who, when he saw men hastening to a conclusion, used to say, 'Stay a little, that we may make an end the sooner.' Impatient lovers do not relish that form of wisdom. In the ancient days of innocence, imagined and extolled by Rousseau, there was no impediment to marriage or any other kind of unconventional pleasure. Those who know and have depicted savages as they actually exist, are aware that even amongst them the preliminaries of marriage are frequently tedious, and as frequently are not less objectionable than any which civilized persons recognise, and of which they approve.

In Tierra del Fuego, which Mr. Henry Argoll saw, but did not traverse during his

visit to Patagonia, a custom prevails which he would never have thought of practising with regard to Miss Solar. When a native of that country desires to marry, he looks about till he discovers a girl who he thinks will make him a suitable wife. He does not declare his feelings to her, but he goes to her parents and offers to work for them. Should they consent and be satisfied with his services he becomes an accepted suitor. Nothing then remains but to catch his bride. She takes to her heels and hides in the woods. He then begins to play at a game of hide-and-seek with her. Should she allow herself to be caught she becomes his wife, but should he fail to find her, then he considers himself formally rejected. She returns home, and he waits until his fancy is set upon another charmer, and he hopes, after performing the allotted tasks, that she will allow him to catch her. This is a form of primitive marriage of which Rousseau and other ignorant admirers of man in a natural state knew nothing, and one which, if it had come to their knowledge, they would have condemned as disgraceful.

Matters are arranged in a simpler, if somewhat painful way amongst the black-fellows of Australia. When one of them resolves to take a wife, and sees a girl to his taste, he spears her, and she is married to him. Thus the native women who have the most scars on their bodies have been the cynosures of many eyes and the targets for many spears in their virgin prime.

In merrie England the path towards matrimony is not strewn with weapons of offence. Yet unpleasant difficulties have to be overcome before the marriage-bells are ringing, and some of the worst occur shortly before an agreement is reached by all the parties concerned. It is when the future bride is a great heiress that the formalities are most numerous and puzzling. A clear understanding has then to be arrived at, and when there is a lady in the case a clear understanding is not always easy. Had not Miss Solar been so rich, and had not her guardian been so exacting, she might have been married with less trouble and fuss.

After much vacillation, Mr. Argoll had

made up his mind that there was nothing for it but to consent to Miss Solar marrying his brother. He decided to do this whilst driving home from Athelstane House on the evening of the day that he had arranged for his portrait being painted. Mr. Henry Argoll dined at Palace Gardens that evening. Mrs. Argoll had insisted upon his doing so. She hoped to have a little talk with him after dinner and discuss the state of his health. She felt certain he would fall ill, after his long and fatiguing journey, unless he took some of her favourite medicine. He had no objection to dine, but he was firmly resolved not to accede to the request which he foresaw his philanthropic sister-in-law would doubtless prefer. Not even to oblige Miss Solar would he consent to swallow a pill.

After dinner, Lord John and Miss Tacon retired to the conservatory, from which they had ousted Miss Solar. Mrs. Argoll was left alone in the drawing-room, greatly to her disappointment; she had to employ herself with worsted-work instead of being more

congenially employed in giving Mr. Henry Argoll medical advice. He and Miss Solar had been asked by Mr. Argoll to join him in the study.

Mr. Argoll was in a forgiving mood. It had occurred to him that his brother's union with Miss Solar would be a most fitting arrangement. He believed that he would always have thought so if his brother had treated him with consideration. He saw the whole case in a new light now that Lord John Cardonald was disposed of, or rather had been provided for. By marrying Miss Tacon he would become a member of the Argoll family. If Miss Solar became his brother's wife the family would have a very rich and a very beautiful member added to it. Besides, Mr. Argoll had no doubt about remaining trustee, and thus retaining the management of the heiress's property. On the whole, then, he was gratified with the turn events had taken. In some incomprehensible manner he attributed the change to his own prudence and sagacity. He cherished the conviction that whatever happened to please

him had been expressly arranged by himself. He was a kind of terrestrial Providence in his own estimation, possessing the marvellous if not miraculous power of shaping things to suit his own ends. In this respect, and in this only, he resembled Louis the Fourteenth.

'Now then, Berta,' he said, when his brother and ward were seated near the writing-desk in his study, 'are you still disposed to throw yourself away upon my artistic brother?'

As he spoke in a tone which was unusually pleasant for him, his brother did not resent this rather discourteous reference. In general, each was on the look-out to render the other uncomfortable.

Miss Solar did not make a direct reply to her guardian's question, simply saying:

'How can you ask such a question, Mr. Argoll?'

He deemed it unnecessary to press her further, and he assumed that the question which she put was equivalent to an indirect answer in the affirmative. What Miss Harriet Byron wrote long ago to Miss

Selby in *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* is still perfectly true : 'It is much easier for a young woman to say *no* than *yes*.' Girls like the 'yes' to be taken for granted, and not extorted from them. The 'no' they can utter with an emphasis which is conclusive.

'Well, young people,' Mr. Argoll went on to say, with a look at his brother which implied that he was not quite in earnest in classing him amongst the young, 'I suppose you know that you will have enough to keep house upon; but be guided by me. Being no longer young, I understand these things, and my advice is, don't spend more money than you can help. The late Baron Rothschild often told me that he found more difficulty in keeping money than in making it; and that is my experience also.'

'I don't know much about you rich City people, Joseph, but I happened to read in to-day's paper a notice of Samuel Morley, who said, if I remember rightly, that he had never much difficulty in making money, but that he was often at a loss how to do the

most good with it; and I think that a finer speech than your friend's.'

'I knew Morley very well. He was not a bad sort of fellow, but he was always ready to act as a philanthropist. I am sure he must have been terribly victimised. That speech shows how nonsensically he must have acted. Money is not intended to be spent upon other people. Any fool can spend it. It is wise folks who know how to take good care of it.'

'Don't distress yourself, Joseph,' said Henry, with emphasis; 'we shall not spend ours too fast, and I think we shall be able to save a little out of our income. What do you say, Berta?'

'I suppose we shall, Henry. At least, I promise to try very hard.'

'Try!' exclaimed Mr. Argoll, with unfeigned surprise; 'I should not think much trying will be necessary. Do you know how much your income will be, Berta?'

'No, Mr. Argoll; but I have always had enough to spend since you were my guardian, and I hope that I shall not have less when I

am married. I mean, of course, we shall both of us have enough, because the money will then be as much Henry's as mine.'

'I don't agree with you, Berta. To speak in that sentimental way sounds very well, but it is not business. Keep a tight grip over your money; that's my advice. Henry can shift for himself.'

'Now, Joseph, as you appear to be better tempered than usual, I do not wish to say anything offensive, but I think that we have had enough advice for one night. You need not trouble yourself about our income. We are not likely to starve. What with my present means, and what I hope to make in addition if I get as much portrait-painting as I ought, we shall at least have three thousand a year between us, and, as I told you at Athelstane House, that is a thousand more than any sensible couple requires to live very comfortably.'

'Are you in earnest, or joking, Henry? Surely you do not mean to chaff me, because if you do, please stop! You know I can't bear it; and, what's more, I won't stand it.'

'Chaffing you, Joseph! I have never ventured to take such a liberty in my life. I know you can't stand or understand it. And why should you think I am doing so now? I was never more in earnest. I have told you the exact truth, and if you do not believe me, I cannot help it. I repeat that two people who cannot live in comfort on from fifteen hundred to two thousand a year do not deserve to live at all.'

'You are quite right, Henry,' said Miss Solar, with warmth, being rather annoyed at Mr. Argoll's tone, and his apparent disbelief in his brother's declaration. She added, addressing Mr. Argoll: 'I entirely agree with Henry. I think he talks most sensibly, and you need not think I am joking. Besides, I feel positive that Henry means every word he says.'

Mr. Argoll gazed upon each of them in turn for a minute with genuine amazement, and then he slowly said:

'All I can say is, that you are the queerest couple I ever heard of. I do not read novels now, finding plenty of fiction in the pro-

spectuses of new companies, but I doubt whether any novelist ever imagined such a pair of simpletons as you are. Now, Henry, keep cool, please, and don't take offence. I am as much in earnest as you, and that is why I must tell you that if I had not heard you indulge in that tirade, I should have thought it impossible for anyone to utter such nonsense.'

'Then, Joseph,' said Henry, without any trace of acerbity, 'if we are both so stupid and silly we are well matched, and that must console Berta and me. We ought to get on all the better on that account. I have read somewhere that when one of two married folks is cleverer than the other, the chances are that they will both be miserable; but when both have an equal share of folly, then they can appreciate and sympathize with each other.'

'I can't see what that's got to do with the present case, Henry; but I must inform you that all your notions about income are ridiculous. Nobody can have too much. Anyone who says the contrary is a socialist, and deserves to be hanged. And, Berta,

you are almost as bad as Henry. I thought you knew better, and I always supposed you were aware that your income would be more than twenty-five thousand a year. What nonsense, then, to talk in that childish way about living upon two, and saving money !'

'You mean, I suppose, Joseph, that Berta will have twenty-five thousand pounds altogether. That is what I thought possible, though I wish it had been less than half the amount, as then we should both have had an equal sum.'

'Never mind, Henry, and don't distress yourself about that,' said Miss Solar, in a cheering and reassuring tone. 'We can spend my portion till it is the same as yours, and then we can be happy ever after, like Mr. Ruskin when he got rid of most of his fortune.'

Mr. Argoll was growing angry and rapidly losing patience, and there was an ominous accent in his voice as he said :

'Now, then, let there be an end to this game of cross-purposes. It annoys me. I like to deal with people who speak sensibly. Listen to me attentively whilst I repeat that

your income, Berta, will exceed twenty-five thousand pounds; and let me tell you that if you are wise you will begin by laying by the greater part of it. There's nothing like providing beforehand for a rainy day. That is my maxim, and I have always tried to act upon it, and I shall be glad to help you to invest your savings.'

The lovers were nearly as greatly taken aback as they would have been if they had been declared paupers. They could scarcely realize the import of Mr. Argoll's communication. They felt as others do when they are told of the myriads of stars in the sky, and of the distances which separate them from each other and from the earth. It may have been their bewilderment which hindered their spirits rising at the prospect of having so much money at their disposal. Certainly Mr. Argoll was justified in regarding his brother as unpractical, and quite unlike the business men who possess more sense than sentiment, and who regard the possession of great wealth as synonymous with the attainment of perfect happiness.

Drafting marriage settlements interests the family solicitor more than the gentle reader. Arranging the settlements of Lord John and Miss Tacon, and Mr. Henry Argoll and Miss Solar, occupied much of Mr. Argoll's attention. He had his own way throughout. Miss Tacon had no right to interfere. Lord John Cardonald professed himself to be ready to agree to anything which Mr. Argoll proposed, thinking that this was the best way to ensure generous treatment. Mr. Argoll's brother and his ward asked him not to mention the subject to them, as they did not wish to have any more discussion with him about money. Their only subject of regret appeared to be that they were not poorer.

Mr. Argoll took special care that the sum which he gave Miss Tacon, and the property which he transferred to Miss Solar, should be held by him in trust for both of them, and should be tied up so tightly that the husband of neither could touch it. Hence, if either husband were a spendthrift his wife would not be beggared.

It was arranged that the two couples should

be married at the parish church on the same day. Two months elapsed between Mr. Henry Argoll's return from Sicily and the celebration of the marriage, and Mr. Argoll's portrait was painted in the interval. When it was finished, Mr. Argoll said:

'Well, Henry, shall I have to pay you for this? As you don't seem to care about money, I don't wish to force it upon you.'

Indeed, Mr. Argoll was now strongly indisposed to part with the four thousand pounds. He had persuaded himself that, after all, he had the better right to the sum, and he much preferred retaining it. He was convinced that it would be safer from loss and better employed in his hands than in those of his brother. There was no fear of his squandering the amount. His brother made him unhappy by saying:

'Hand over the cheque, Joseph. I have fairly earned it now.'

'But what will you do with so much money, Henry?'

It was a severe trial to Mr. Argoll to find that his brother clung to his part of the

bargain, and it was with undisguised reluctance that he wrote out a cheque for the four thousand pounds. Being a careful and methodical man, Mr. Argoll asked for a stamped receipt.

'I never gave a receipt in my life,' said his brother. 'Surely you can do without one!'

'It's quite clear, Henry,' was the reply, 'that you will never make a good man of business. I will draw out a receipt and you can sign it, only don't omit to put on a penny stamp first.'

Mr. Henry Argoll would never have thought of this formality unless reminded of it, and this confirmed his brother in his belief that he was unbusiness-like in all things. After the receipt had been written, stamped, and signed to Mr. Argoll's satisfaction, he said:

'Now let me take care of your money for you; you may lose it.' It was his firm conviction that his brother was but an overgrown child, who could not be entrusted with the safe custody of a large sum, and who

would certainly make an indiscreet use of it. Hence his suggestion that the cheque should be handed back to him in order that he might keep it for his brother, just as he would have done if he had presented a silver or gold coin to a child, and then had said, 'Now, darling, let me take care of it for you, or else put it at once into your money-box, where it will be quite safe.'

Some children are so unreasonable as not to value the money which they are not allowed to spend. Mr. Henry Argoll was not a child. He considered himself old and sensible enough to be capable of spending his money as he thought fit.

It is true that Mr. Henry Argoll's way in this case seemed decidedly eccentric to his brother, who was told, after parting with the cheque :

'As you wish to know, Joseph, how I purpose dealing with this sum, I shall now tell you nearly as much as I know myself. I have never had so much money at my command before, and for once I may be lavish in my own way. In the first place, I shall

give Ella a thousand pounds out of it as a wedding present.'

'Surely, Henry, you do not seriously mean that! What could Ella do with it? She is as great a baby as you in money matters.'

'Allow me to finish, Joseph. Ella has told me she has nothing of her own, and that Lord John has a great desire to go off in a yacht to the far North for a wedding trip. Ella is longing to do so, having read Lord Dufferin's charming *Letters from High Latitudes*, and she thinks that if Lord John went over the same ground he would write quite as clever a book. I don't agree with her, and certainly I have no desire to read anything he might write. However, she cannot get the absurd notion out of her head, and no argument short of actual experience will convince her that her future husband has not a spark of Lord Dufferin's genius.'

'Well, Henry, I was prepared for hearing something absurd, but a more idiotic way of wasting money I could not have imagined. What woman in her senses would wish to

spend her honeymoon on board a yacht? I'm sure I should not.'

'Of course not, Joseph; but then you are not a woman, and you are very much in your senses.'

'Now, Henry, I don't like being spoken to in that way. You know perfectly well what I mean. Perhaps Ella will find out her mistake as soon as she is sea-sick, and then she will not bless you for your wedding present, so the money is certain to do mischief if disposed of in such a senseless fashion.'

'But Ella is not afraid of the sea, and I don't think she will suffer.'

'Fiddlesticks! Women never think they can be the worse for anything they fancy. However, as you appear obstinate as usual, it's no use my protesting. But I thought Lord John was old enough to have had more sense. He would not get me to advance him a thousand to go off to the North Pole in a yacht.'

'Probably not, Joseph, and therefore he is not likely to trouble you. Yet it's no use

telling you what I purpose doing with the handsome payment you have made me if you go on in that ridiculous way. The money is mine now, and I may do what I like with it. If I were to throw it out of the window you would be none the worse.'

'Yes; I should be the worse. For then I should have positive proof that you were a lunatic, which is the next thing to being an artist. You will be wiser some day, I hope. Money is not intended to be dealt with in that light-handed fashion. Those who labour to get it, as I do, would never be so heedless as you in parting with it.'

'And have I not worked hard at your portrait for nearly two months? Is that an amusing or easy way of making money? Do you take as long and as much trouble in the City to make four thousand pounds?'

'I can't agree with you, Henry, when you speak in that foolish style. You know nothing of life in the City; if you did, you would not compare it to the easy-going existence of artists, whose work is either mere amusement or child's play. If I only got the colours

mixed, and could use a brush, I should soon paint quite as good pictures as most of those I have seen.'

Mr. Henry gave a scornful laugh, of which his brother did not take any notice, but continued:

'Let us say no more about the matter. It is evident that you don't understand me, and never will; I am sick of hearing your speeches; they show that you cannot get rid of your old stupid prejudices against the City of which all sensible persons are proud. But mark my words, and take a hint that is kindly meant. You may want this money some day, and then it will be no satisfaction to know that it helped Lord John to go on a yachting trip. When he is at the North Pole you may have to go to the workhouse, and I don't think you will like that. You will then be very sorry that you wasted so much money that might have provided you for a long time with food, clothing, and lodging.'

Mr. Argoll was moved almost to tears as he uttered these words. He could not endure

to see anyone wasting his substance. He regarded such conduct as almost equal in atrocity to breaking all the Commandments in succession. What weighed with him the most was the thought that his brother's folly was largely due to his own generosity. He inwardly vowed never to be generous again. He was more convinced than ever that parting with a large sum of money, save under compulsion or in order to bring a larger amount back, was a deplorable and unpardonable error.

The brothers turned away from each other in a state of ill-suppressed wrath. If strangling the other would not have entailed penal consequences, either would have had instant resort to that method of ending discussion. Mr. Argoll regarded his younger brother as not amenable to reason. Mr. Henry Argoll looked upon his elder brother as a mere money-grubber, who had no soul for anything save piling one shilling and sovereign on the top of the other. What Mr. Henry Argoll designed to do with the remainder of the four thousand pounds is a

mystery which is still locked in his own bosom. If his brother had not been so hasty it might have been disclosed.

When the Countess of Armadale learned that her brother-in-law, Lord John Cardonald, was engaged to marry a girl who was good looking, who would bring him a fair income, and whose uncle belonged to an old historic family, she entirely approved of the match, and she accepted an invitation to attend the wedding. Her husband was too great an invalid to be present. Not having any money to expend on a wedding gift, he cheerfully sent his younger brother his blessing and best wishes. Other noble and notable relatives and friends of Lord John were so gracious as to honour him with their countenance and support.

Many of Mr. Henry Argoll's artistic cronies, and many whom he regarded as his malignant critics, expressed a wish to see him 'turned off,' as they phrased it. He did not mind the phrase, and he did not dread the ceremony. They, too, readily accepted invitations to attend the wedding. None of

the guests was so much gratified and impressed as aunt Irma, who travelled from Frankfort in order to be present. She was awed with the grandeur of Palace Gardens. It is scarcely necessary to add that the wedding presents to Miss Solar, the great heiress, were magnificent and costly, and those to Miss Tacon, the poor orphan, were trivial and valueless.

Palace Gardens had never been so filled with fine folks and gay carriages as on the day of the double wedding. It made a sensation. The parish church was crowded with spectators. Impartial onlookers differed in opinion as to which bride was the more beautiful, but all agreed in thinking that each seemed very happy. A long and picturesque account of the ceremony appeared in the *St. Mary Abbot's News*. A leading article was devoted to kindly comments on an event which was not only interesting in itself, but which was certain to be memorable in the annals of the old parish.

Lord and Lady John Cardonald started for Grimsby as soon as they could after

the ceremony, where they embarked the following morning on the *Spindrift*. Their cruise in high latitudes lasted longer than they had anticipated. Venturing too far north, out of a desire to outstrip preceding explorers, Lord John's yacht was caught in the ice, where it remained fast all the winter. Late in the following spring a steamship, sent to the rescue of the happy couple, extricated their yacht from the ice, and towed it into a home port, the yacht being so much damaged as not to be seaworthy. The repairs cost a large sum. Lord John bore a grudge towards Mr. Henry Argoll for his present. Mr. Argoll chuckled over the result. He had proved himself to be a true prophet, and that gave him unbounded gratification. On the other hand, Lord and Lady John Cardonald had the compensation of being the lions of the London season.

Lady John Cardonald told her friends and acquaintances that her husband was writing a book, which she felt sure would surpass in interest anything which had ever been pub-

lished. She had seen him fill many pages of paper with their common experiences, and what he allowed her to read charmed her beyond measure. At her request he had introduced the story of the waterspout, and he had embellished and magnified it so as to make the story seem almost as fresh as it was extraordinary.

Mr. and Mrs. Henry Argoll started for the Black Forest, where they passed their honeymoon sketching and discussing what they should do with their money. On their way back to England they paid a visit to aunt Irma at Frankfort, and spent a fortnight there. Mr. Henry Argoll took delight in cultivating aunt Irma's acquaintance. He was pleased to find that amongst the German books that she admired the most, the works of Heine had a prominent place. This was partly due to her having seen Heine when she was a little girl. He used to call at her father's house. One of her cherished reminiscences was that Heine had once taken her on his knee and called her a pretty girl (*ein hübsches Mädchen*), and kissed

her. It was most natural, then, for her to think highly of Heine.

Frau Decker called once and chatted with the newly-married pair, as she said, or rather, as it seemed to them, she indulged in a monologue, during an hour.

'Oh, Henry!' exclaimed his wife, after Frau Decker had left and when comparative silence reigned in the room, 'would it be very wrong to pay some one to choke Frau Decker? She is a horrible woman, and not fit to live. She is worse than a nightmare. My head is in a whirl with her awful voice and interminable questions.'

'Never mind, Berta; we shall not invite her to our house, when we have one. Poor woman! she rather amused me, though I confess I could not have stood much more of her talk. I am not surprised that she is a widow. But she has a use in the world which you may not have thought of. When I hear a woman like her uttering nonsense, I can the better appreciate one like you, who always talks so delightfully.'

His wife said nothing, but she did not

appear displeased. Her former aversion to personal compliments was somewhat modified. Indeed, a wife seldom complains of getting too many from her husband.

But what of Mr. Argoll's portrait? it may be asked. Certainly the portrait deserves a word of notice, especially as it proved to be a work of art. Even the critics who saw it at Palace Gardens, where it was shown on the wedding-day for the first time, expressed their surprise; they had not thought Mr. Henry Argoll capable of producing anything so striking. The likeness was good, yet the portrait was no hard and unimpressive photograph. The features were true to Nature, and they were the mirror of a mind. A finer piece of portraiture had not been executed for many a day. At last Mr. Henry Argoll had made his mark as an artist. There was no fear of his starving now. He would not lack commissions. Success had crowned his efforts when he was indifferent to it.

Mrs. Argoll was the loudest in praise of the portrait. In her eyes it was a perfect marvel. She could not understand how Mr.

Henry Argoll could have produced it. 'I never thought, J. M.,' she said rapturously to her husband, 'that such a likeness of you could possibly have been painted. Why, you look as if you might step out of the frame. The face is your very image when you are going off to Athelstane House, or when you come back and tell me you have had a capital day in the City.'

'Well, my dear,' he replied, in a much less enthusiastic tone, 'the portrait does not seem a bad one. It is far better than I expected, as I never believed Henry could paint at all. But I don't quite like the expression. There is a look in my face which reminds me of that rascally brigand, Carlo Nerone.'

Though no judge of artistic effect, Mr. Argoll was perfectly justified in his criticism. And yet the portrait was a speaking likeness.

THE END.

BILLING & SONS, PRINTERS, GUILDFORD.
G., C. & Co.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA
3 0112 084218467